DanganRonpa 69 Ultra Despair Gang: Really, ANOTHER Episode?

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/31169219.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
Categories:	Gen, Multi
Fandoms:	Dangan Ronpa - All Media Types, Undertale (Video Game), Vocaloid, PaRappa the Rapper, UTAU, Super Mario & Related Fandoms, Family Guy (Cartoon), My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, WarioWare, Yandere Simulator (Video Game), Gorillaz, SpongeBob SquarePants (Cartoon), Hoshi no Kaabii | Kirby: Right Back at Ya!, A Hat in Time (Video Game)
Characters:	Hinata Hajime, Papyrus (Undertale), Kagamine Rin, Matt Major, Sunny Funny, Katy Kat, Paula Fox, PJ Berri, Peach-hime | Peach Toadstool, Munakata Kyosuke (Dangan Ronpa), Megurine Luka
Additional Tags:	Multi-dimensional apocalypse, Crossover, Sequel, Protag!Hajime, Angst, Heavy Angst, Fluff, Hurt/Comfort, let's just say no one is okay, but hey there's gay ppl!, contains DR69 spoilers!!!, there are CGs again too, ...and yes again drawn by me
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-08 Updated: 2021-06-26 Words: 43,369 Chapters: 5/?

DanganRonpa 69 Ultra Despair Gang: Really, ANOTHER Episode?

by lennardd

Summary

Hajime Hinata wakes up in the middle of a less than coherent-looking city, with no memory of how and only a hacking gun beside him. After meeting a few unfamiliar faces that decide to tag along (including a skeleton of all things), they strive to figure out what the hell is going on.

Can they escape this city? What relationships will be formed along the way? Will despair consume even the people on the outside too?

A sequel to my fic: DanganRonpa 69, a crossover killing game!

Notes

You honor, it was simply for the bit--
Ahaha! Hello! You thought DR69 was gone for good? Well think again, as I bring the next batch of despair your way! Oh god...
With a fresh new cast of characters I've already grown an emotional attachment to, what could possibly go wrong?

Obligatory warning: this fic contains spoilers for DanganRonpa 69, including the deaths, survivors and the mastermind! So if you've never read it before and want to experience it for yourself, I highly recommend reading it before this! It's kinda long, but worth it because this basically picks up after where it ends, so it'll make more sense.

Also, another warning: this fic can get FUCKED. I may be over-exaggerating but I believe it can get way worse then DR69. So just be cautious that I may dive into some, uh, pretty left-field topics sometimes. But we all know how fucked up UDG is anyway so what were you really expecting? Also, the format won't be completely sticking to UDG: it may take some inspiration, but I have my own story also.

ALSO also, this may be a bit... self indulgent? I just want full creative freedom over this without having to care too much about pleasing anyone specifically so I hope you understand that haha.

And just to clarify for anyone wondering, I've tagged all previous fandoms present in DR69, however not all of them will be used equally. I'd say the most prominent ones are DanganRonpa, Vocaloid and Parappa the Rapper (and Undertale to an extent). This doesn't mean the other fandoms won't be used, in fact there will be at least one character present from each fandom in the story. Also don't worry about character tags for now they'll make more sense later adkja

So, without further ado, let's get back to that despair folks!

Chapter 1: A New Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

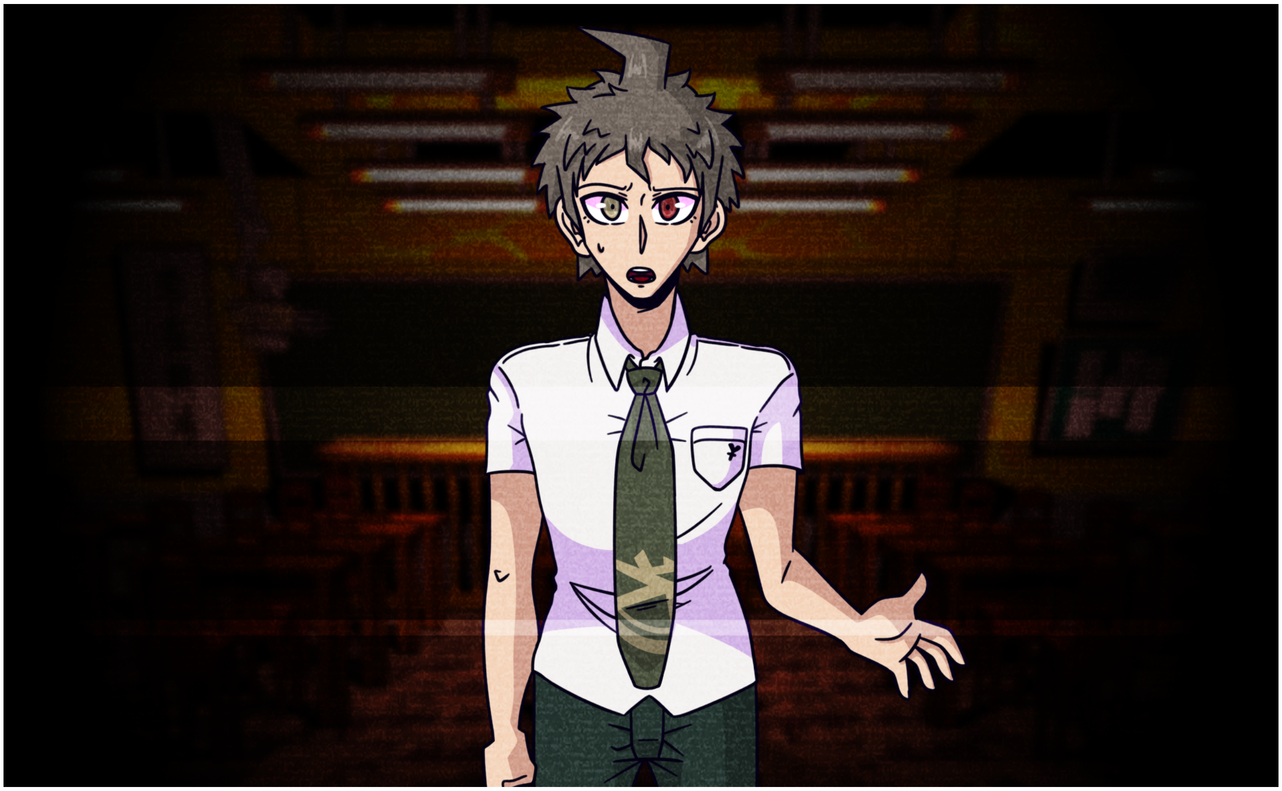
“...Hello?”

…

“...Can you hear me?”

…

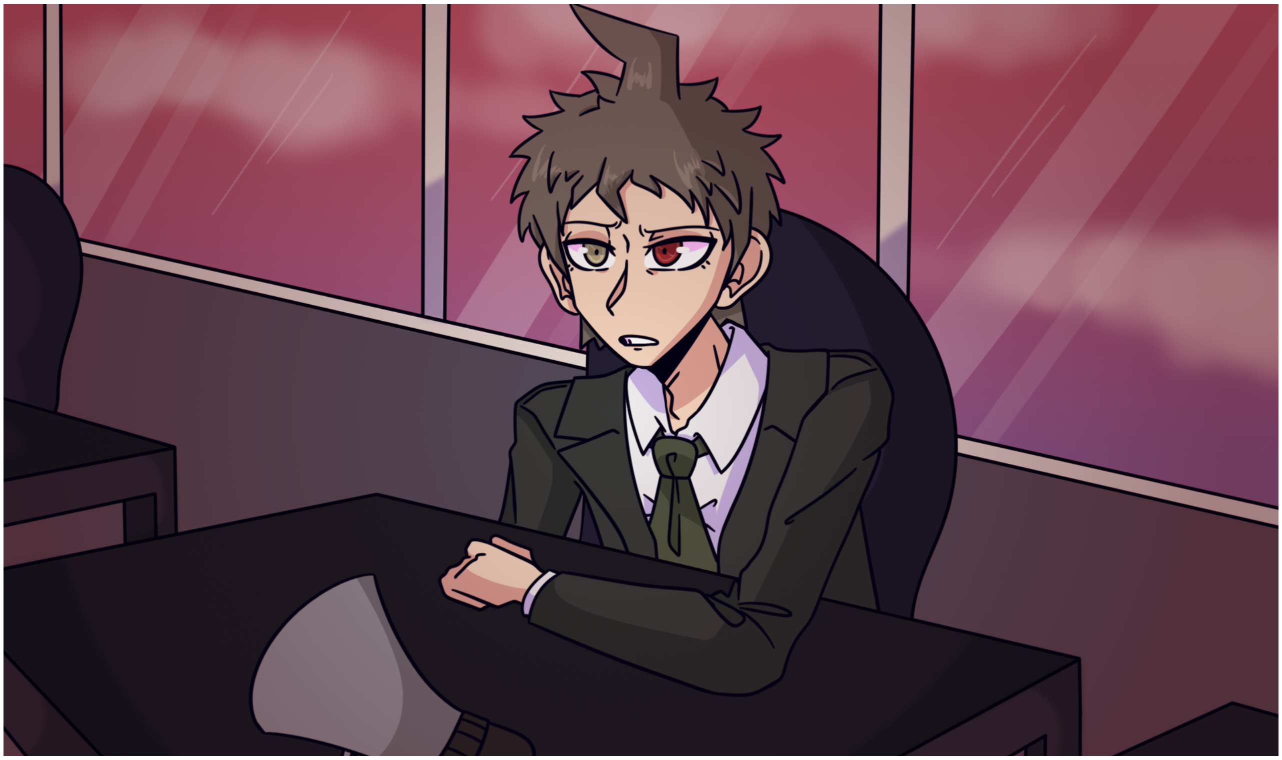
“... *Nagito* ?”



“Nagito, if you can hear this, where are you? What are you doing right now? It sounds useless of me to ask, but please don’t do anything irrational, okay? It’s… We know how bad killing games are. But you know better than what whoever’s behind this wants. They may not even be looking for despair. Nagito please, just, I know you’ve changed so don’t… But I do believe in you. We all do. Or at least I do. And, that has to mean something, right? For me to be here, instead of anyone else, means that you care what I think so… Just… Don't do anything dangerous."

Darkness. Shadows folding into each other like an oil painting, the blackness swirling and deforming. Perhaps there was something to be seen in that image. A grainy, soft ground: sand, was it? The sand faded gently into a horizon of deep liquid. The sea. And, to the right, tall flora of the exotic kind. Palm trees? It was so warm, so light, so beezy. And then the scene started to get brighter. Lighter. Whiter. Much too white. It was blinding. There wasn't any sand, any sea, any palm trees anymore, but just white.

And that was when Hajime Hinata's eyes slowly drifted open.



He groaned softly. What was that? He looked down at the charcoal black desk his cheek rested upon, and started to lift his head up. The first thought that came to mind was that he was sleeping at his desk again. It wasn't the first time it had happened. But then, his desk wasn't black. Did he fall asleep at someone else's desk? How did he even manage that?

So then he looked around, and his train of thought completely came to a halt. This wasn't his desk, and this wasn't his office, and this definitely wasn't Future Foundation. It was, well, what was it? It looked to be like a run-of-the-mill business office: an average job for average people. Rows of desks stretched to each end of the long room, all exactly the same as the adjacent one. Even his desk was the same.

“... *Huh* ?” And that’s when it really started to sink in that he was not where he was meant to be. At all.

“What the hell…?” Hajime started to feel the sharp pang of adrenaline rush through his veins, manifesting into what would soon be panic. In an attempt to calm himself down, he whipped his head around for any sign of life. No one. It was completely abandoned. However, he managed to catch the sight of windows behind him. At least he wasn’t trapped, hopefully.

Although that didn’t excuse the fact that the sky was a stark, pitiful red.

Red?

And that’s when it all came flooding back to him.

Hajime Hinata was in branch 15 of Future Foundation, an organisation that banded together to rebuild the world crumbled to discord by the Ultimate Despair. They saved him and his classmates from themselves, and in return they agreed to work alongside them. At the time, everything was going well: most of the world was starting to function as it was before, and Hajime was so close from taking a break and enjoying a worry-free day on Jabberwock beach. However, as if the world resented him, another tragedy -- one much too similar to the previous -- crashed into their lives and forced them into a catastrophic event. The word ‘multi-dimensional’ was thrown around a lot, and he heard rumours of insanely fictional-sounding creatures being spotted roaming around.

But what was more detrimental to him was the news of yet another killing game. After the supposed final killing game to end all killing games within the Future Foundation headquarters, everyone had thought that had been the end of it. Oh how blissfully ignorant they were.

But what was possibly even worse than any of that was seeing his friend, Nagito Komaeda, waking up in that killing game as he witnessed it all from a simple monitor.

It was so surreal to see Nagito interact with what looked to be mascots, or puppets, or whatever they were. But the fact that they were real, feeling and thinking organisms like Nagito and Hajime was what made it harder to comprehend. It wasn't like it was *all* weird creatures: there were some humans too. Yet, it was so, so weird.

So he watched. He watched for hours on end. To be in a killing game was one thing, but to watch one? It was an entirely new experience. Hajime got to witness murders take place, got to watch executions from different angles, hell, even got the chance to watch private, personal conversations. However, despite all that, Hajime was always the most focused on Nagito. It's not like he wanted to be, but it was for his safety. He wanted to make sure Nagito never meddled, or overstepped his boundary. He (miraculously) survived one killing game, and Hajime was sure as hell he was not going to screw this up again.

And perhaps he was too focused, as what happened next completely took him off guard. It was mostly a blur, but Hajime had been, put simply, kidnapped. Honestly, it just sounded ridiculous, and yet it still happened. Kidnapped, forced into a dark room with a shoddy background of what looked to be a Hope's Peak classroom, and made to talk to a camera about Nagito. And then darkness.

Finally, he was here, in this office. Back to the beginning.

Hajime turned back to the desk in front of him. His head didn't hurt, although he still felt mildly drowsy. Recalling everything up to this point had helped him relax a little, but Hajime still needed to know where he was. Did his captors dump him in a random building and left it at that? Why go through the trouble to even place him inside a building, however?

"Huh, what's this?" Hajime's eyes had drifted as he was deep in thought, and he noticed an object on the desk he missed before. "A megaphone? Wait, no, is this a hacking gun?"

Picking it up, Hajime studied the weapon. He never really used hacking gun's too much as he was more used in admin and the offices. Although he did really admire the technology. Hajime aimed the gun straight ahead to get a feel for it. It did feel kind of fun, but unfortunately he knew this wasn't the time to be doing something so useless.

“But why do I have a hacking gun?” Hajime pondered aloud. As he did so, a sudden harsh crackle almost made him jump in shock. What was that?

Looking up, he noticed an intercom attached to the wall. That must be where the feedback was emitting from. But, that would mean…

“He--... Tes-- T-- One-- Ee--...” A voice started to bleed from the small speakers, it’s interference making Hajime’s ears twitch. “Hello?! Oh! It’s working now! Yay!”

The voice struck Hajime as young, sweet, but with a hint of unknown intent lurking underneath. Nevertheless, he sat still as he braced himself for whatever was to come next.

“Ehehe~! Welcome to the city, you lovely little small people!” The voice cheered with an aura of sick delight. “I am the new ruler, and along with my friends we will be in control of everything here! Now, now, this must all be so scary to you, huh, huh? You’re lost, forgotten, trapped, with no way out of here. How does that feel, huh, huh? Hehe~ But hear me, it’s okay to feel scared, and useless, and weak. The weaker you are, in fact, the more fun it is! And we’re all going to have so much fun together! Have you met my little friends already? They’re ready to give you a big ol’ hug… And then rip your arms off! Maybe even your head too! Hehehe! Ah, you’re all stupid scum. Horrible, horrible scum. I hope you all burn in hell~! Goodbye!”

Dead silence. The intercom clicked off as soon as the voice spoke their last syllable, leaving Hajime to reel over those words. First off, what exactly could he think? Whatever that voice was trying to say about the city or their ‘little friends’ didn’t make much sense other than some kind of sadistic threat. Hajime didn’t recognise the voice, but he sure as hell was forming an opinion of them anyway, and it wasn’t positive.

Sighing, Hajime began to rise from his seat, hacking gun still on hand, as he racked his brain on what to do next. The only logical thing that came to mind was to contact Future Foundation somehow and request assistance out of the city. They needed Hajime anyway, didn’t they? Although, a quick brush against his pockets told him that he had no electronics on him, and a little tampering at one of the office computers proved futile. Damn. He supposed he’d have to find some sort of communication elsewhere.

“Staying here any longer won’t do me any good either,” Hajime further thought aloud, “I’m sure I’ll be able to find someone outside, right?”

Surveying the office one last time, Hajime caught sight of an exit, and made his way towards it. Fortunately, he was situated on the first floor of the building, so getting outside didn’t take too long. When he stepped outside, however, he had to pause for a moment to take in everything.

To say the least, it was bad. Just as bad as before. Most buildings seemed to be in ruins, debris lying everywhere. The more sturdy-built buildings stood still, but it wasn’t like they were in any arguably better condition. The ashy red sky shone brighter down on him from out here, shadowing the world in a despairful shade of isolation. It wasn’t like Hajime didn’t know anything about this; he was simply more used to the more cleaner environment of Jabberwock Island. So, if anything, he knew he wasn’t anywhere close to there.

Keeping his grip on his weapon, Hajime picked back up on walking. He didn’t know where to go exactly, but moving was better than staying put. The streets didn’t look familiar at all, and yet they brought a sense of nostalgia as if he could just barely recognise things far in the back of his memories. It was uncanny, and Hajime frankly wasn’t a fan of it.

After turning a few corners, Hajime began to relax a little. No sign of life still: good in terms of no one trying to attack him, bad in terms of ever finding a way out of here. This city definitely wasn’t abandoned if that intercom broadcast had played, and Hajime held onto the hope that luck would help him out just this once.

Turning one more corner, his prayers had been answered, although, more or less in the form of a nightmare.

Monokumas.

“Crap…” He seethed under his breath. Six, seven, perhaps even ten mechanically malicious bears stammered around the empty street, some with claws stained in the bright pink liquid Hajime knew would be his if he didn’t act fast. He initially wondered if he could avoid them somehow, but that thought was quickly shattered as one of the robots spotted him with their cold eyes and shrieked out that infamous mono-laugh, grabbing the attention of the rest. Hajime panicked internally, thoughts flooding through his mind too fast to process. He knew how to use the gun, right? Okay but he really needed to start aiming because a bunch of Monokumas were heading straight for him and wait why were they blue?

Setting that strange oversight aside, Hajime took a step back and held the megaphone out towards the closest coming robot, and frantically pulled the trigger. A burst of electrical energy shot out the weapon, hurling straight at the Monokuma. When it made contact a bang echoed out and the Monokuma was sent flying backwards a few feet. So far so good. Then the Monokuma stood up again. Not so good.

"What the hell?! Why didn't it… Wait! I need to aim for the eye, don't I?" Hajime exclaimed as he made a second attempt on the same bear, this time the shot crashing straight into its eye and causing it to tumble onto the ground without further movement. Phew. But it wasn't time to relax yet, and he had to deal with the rest of the charging hoard.

Break, break, break. The blue bullets pelted the monstrous bears, and Hajime started to dash down the street. In a way, it felt good to finally kill some variation of the bear who shamelessly hosted the hell that was his island killing game.

What he didn't expect next, however, was the cold sense of something jumping up behind him.

Turning sharply around, Hajime watched helplessly as a rogue Monokuma beared its claws high in the air, ready to pounce down onto him. And yet it never happened. As instead, a blur of white shot directly through the robot's stomach, sending it flying past Hajime's head and onto the concrete like the rest of its kin. Hajime stood there, bewildered, until he shook his head and checked around for any more active Monokumas. Upon seeing that was the last of them, Hajime finally took a deep exhale of relief. Thank god.

After a couple of deep breaths to get him back on track, Hajime turned to the Monokuma with the white object piercing its stomach. Just what in the hell was that? He walked closer to it, and knelt down on one knee to inspect the object.

"Is this… a *bone* ?" Hajime's eyes widened in confusion. It was in a comedic shape, more like how he'd see bones be portrayed in a children's drawing, but was certainly the same material as bone. Hajime didn't dare touch it, and instead brushed it off as he stood back up and turned around.

Only to be met face first into the chest of a much taller figure.

He reared his head up.

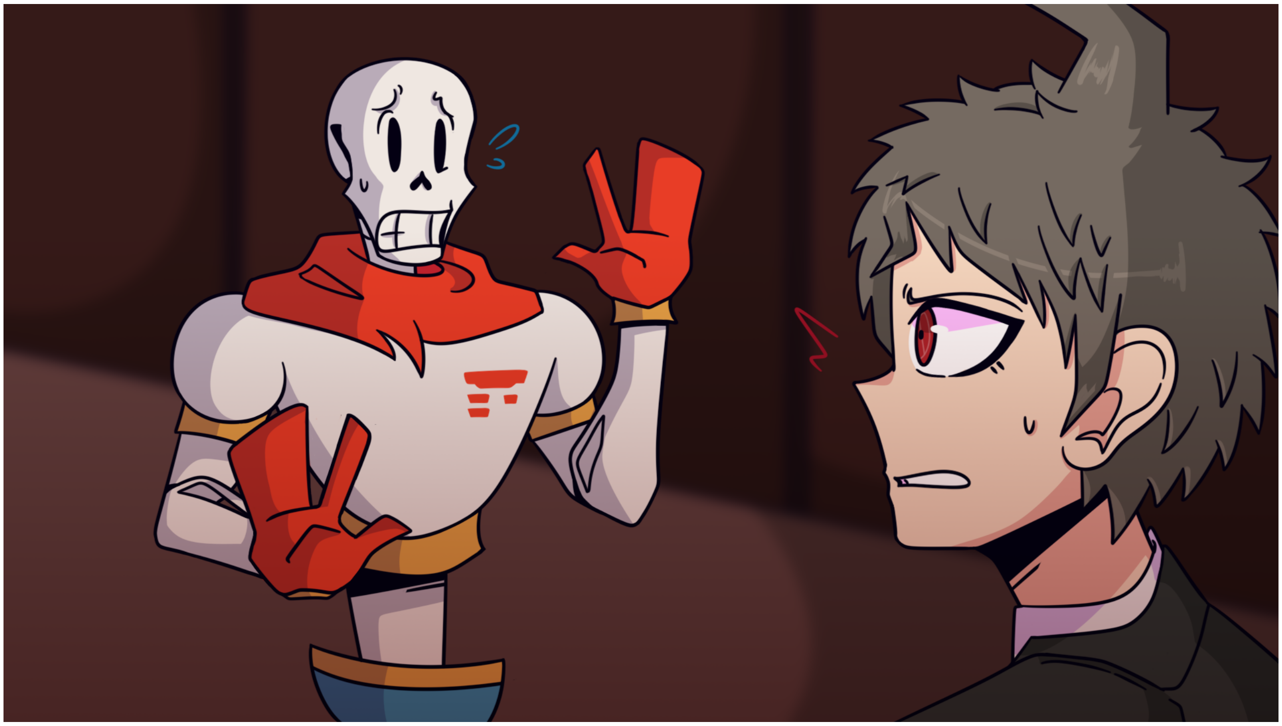
The figure looked back down at him.

And that’s when Hajime finally realised he was looking at a *skeleton* .

“AAAHHHHHH!?”

“EYAAAHHHHHH!”

Both jumped backwards, the skeleton jumping a lot further back (and a lot higher for that matter). Hajime frantically held his hacking gun in front of him at the skeleton as far as his arms could stretch.



“Who the hell are you?! *What* the hell are you?!” He demanded.

The skeleton immediately held their hands out, waving them about in a beserk fashion. “Please human, do not attack me with your strange megaphone! Have mercy!”

“W-What?! Just… What the hell do you-- *Hang on* …” Hajime slowly paused as he lowered his hacking gun a little. Why did this skeleton look familiar? No, there was no way.

And then suddenly he remembered.

A participant of the killing game’s motive video. Sans the Skeleton’s motive video. This was that person.

This was Papyrus.

“Hello…? Human?” The skeleton, no, Papyrus spoke out, snapping Hajime out of his internal thoughts. He looked up at him.

“Huh? Uh, sorry, I…” Hajime lowered his gun fully. “You’re not a threat, are you?”

“A threat?! I am furthest from a threat.” Papyrus stated as a-matter-of-factly. “That is, unless you are. Are you a threat?” He reeled back again.

“N-No, uh, I’m not a threat. But you shouldn’t have snuck up on me like that.” Hajime scolded lightly.

“Oh, my apologies, human! I did not mean to startle you. In fact, I was trying to save you!”

Hajime furrowed his brow. “Save me? Ah…” He looked behind him towards the bone lodged in the Monokuma. “You mean, this was your doing?”

“Yes! You see, you were in quite the conundrum with those bears, but not to worry, the Great Papyrus saved you from, uh, whatever they were going to do…” Papyrus explained with a tone of arrogance.

Hajime was still trying to wrap his head around talking to a literal *skeleton* who had supposedly saved him with a *bone* . To be completely fair, it wasn’t as strange as the oddities that occurred in the Neo World Program, but the fact that this was real life made it just that harder to comprehend. “Uh, thank you, I guess…”

“The pleasure’s all mine, human!”

“Can you stop calling me human? I have a name you know.”

“Oh?”

“Hajime Hinata, branch 15 of Future Foundation.” Hajime formally introduced himself.

“Hello Hajime Hinata branch 15 of Future Foundation, I am the Great Papyrus!” Papyrus grabbed Hajime’s hand and shook it with a large beam.

“My name’s just Hajime…” Hajime deadpanned.

“Oh, sorry, just Hajime!” Papyrus corrected himself. Hajime groaned in frustration, pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

“So, Papyrus,” Hajime began shortly after, “You were forced to be in a motive video as well?”

Papyrus suddenly gasped. “How did you know?!”

“Well, I’m a motive video victim as well. Also, didn’t you see? Your video was played to everyone in the killing game.” Hajime clarified.

“It was? Hopefully my brother, Sans, saw it then: my message was for him after all!”

Hajime raised a brow. “Yeah, it was for Sans…? After all he… Oh. *Oh.* Papyrus, I’m… I’m so sorry that--”

“Do not worry, Hajime, for while Sans can be quite the lazy character, I am confident that he is still fighting hard for his friends on the outside!” Papyrus pointed a firm finger up in confidence. Hajime was at a complete loss for words. What was Papyrus talking about? And then it hit him.

Papyrus didn’t know, did he?

Once Hajime realised that, the gates of guilt came crashing down on him. Oh god. Papyrus really didn’t know what went on in that case at all. But Hajime wasn’t going to tell him that. At least not yet.

How would he feel if a complete stranger he just met told him his brother died?

“Uh, y-yeah. It’s good that you have… faith in him…” Hajime fumbled out, hoping his obvious pauses didn’t catch him as suspicious. It seemed to work, however, as Papyrus nodded along as happy as one blissfully unaware could be.

“And you said you are a victim of those videos as well? I suppose we have something in common then, Hajime!” Papyrus carried on.

“I guess we do, huh? Were you also brought to this city then?”

“Yes. I have been walking around for quite a while now. I was starting to think I was the only one here until that strange announcement from the sky.”

“What? You mean the broadcast?” Hajime inquired.

“Is that what you call it? Human technology is awfully interesting!” Papyrus then put a finger to his chin. “I’m not exactly sure what the person was trying to say, but they were quite rude about it!”

“You can say that again. There’s obviously some asshole trying to screw around…” Hajime let his more vulgar opinion slip out.

“In any case, I don’t think we should worry about it too much!” Papyrus suggested.

“Then, what were you doing this whole time in the city?”

“Well, ever since these odd goings-on, I’ve decided to put aside my usual duties and attempt to save more people like myself! However, I’ve not been quite successful in finding anyone, until I ran into you, that is!” Papyrus shot a grin at Hajime. Hajime paused. Papyrus was starting to seem like a pretty selfless guy. All he really knew about him from the motive video was that he dearly missed his brother, and got quite worked up about it. Another reason not to drop *that* news. “What about you?”

“Me? I’ve kinda decided to set out to contact Future Foundation to rescue me, I guess.” Saying his plan out loud made Hajime feel a lot less sincere than Papyrus’ search and rescue agenda.

“What is Future Foundation?” Papyrus tilted his head.

“It’s an organisation rebuilding the world from the tragedy. Not this tragedy specifically, but we were basically forced into dealing with this one…” Hajime scratched the back of his neck.

"Oh, so they're your friends? That's great! In that case, we should team up and rescue people for your foundation!" Papyrus raised a determined fist.

"W-What? What are you talking about?" Hajime asked.

"We've both been through the same experience, correct? Therefore we should continue our journeys together! Especially since those bears seem to be appearing everywhere: it possibly cannot be safe to part ways!"

Hajime thought over Papyrus' idea. On one hand, he'd be travelling around with a skeleton who seemed to lack any form of common sense, on the other, he may run into way more Monokumas than he could handle alone. And Papyrus *did* save him from getting his face slashed in with a less than pleasant scar. And, hell, to leave another survivor like himself wouldn't be very smart at all.

And so, Hajime sighed. "Fine. I… guess you could tag along."

"Aha! You won't regret your decision, dear Hajime!" Papyrus happily cheered as he patted Hajime's back, perhaps a bit too hard. Hajime cleared his throat and turned around.

"Let's just keep going this way." He pointed down the street, and the two began to venture down. If he had to be honest with himself, Hajime wasn't one-hundred percent sure on how he was supposed to do this with Papyrus. However, if they were both victims of the motive video in the same city, did that mean the rest of the victims were here as well somewhere? And did that mean Papyrus was expecting to find all of them before Hajime could contact Future Foundation? Sharing an island with 16 people was tiring enough, let alone walking around the streets with god knows how many more, considering some motive video's could contain literal groups of people.

All that Hajime could do for now was brush it aside. He willingly roped himself into this, and so he'd have to deal with that bridge when he crossed it.

While Hajime was contemplating about the whole thing, he hadn't realised that Papyrus had started to talk again, lost in his own little one-sided conversation about… royal guards?

“Of course, you may think there’s no need for a Royal Guard up here on the surface anymore, but I believe that--”

“Wait.” Hajime held up his arm, cutting Papyrus off and stopping them in their tracks. He glanced around the corner they were about to pass, turning his head back sharply with an aspirated grunt.

“What is it?”

“More Monokumas.”

Papyrus thought for a moment. “How many?”

“More than last time. *Great* .” Hajime huffed. “Alright, well we shouldn’t go out there until we have a plan. It’s best to stay cautious and-- Papyrus?” Hajime looked around, startled to find no sign of the skeleton, until he turned back to the Monokuma-infested street to see none other than Papyrus charging ahead.

“Hey, stop--! Argh…” Hajime frustratedly called out before bracing himself and rushing into the street after him. He however halted sharply on his toes as he stared on at the scene in front of him: Papyrus manifested what looked to be a much similar bone from before out of *thin air* , and directed it at a Monokuma dashing towards him. Huh. So it was real. It was still impossibly hard to believe, although.

And then it missed the Monokuma.

“What?! How could you dodge my imperfectly perfect attack?!” Papyrus exclaimed, taken aback for all the wrong reasons. The Monokuma didn’t seem to care, continuing to lessen the gap between them, fast.

That’s when Hajime himself sprung into action, bolting in front of Papyrus and blasting a bullet directly into the bear’s eye. He turned to Papyrus, who, well, wasn’t there anymore. Instead, he was already attacking another robot, much to Hajime’s thinning patience.

“Papyrus!” Hajime yelled.

“Thank you for helping me, Hajime, but there are more enemies I must attend to!” Papyrus innocently shouted back as he manifested another bone.

“That wasn’t what I meant-- Just-- Damnit!” Hajime noticed more Monokumas coming towards him, and turned to deal with them before they could with him. As he turned back, he watched another odd sight unfold.

“Aha!” Papyrus smirked at a Monokuma. “You’re blue now-- Wait weren't you already blue?! Now I don’t know which one I made blue!!” He exasperated, frantically placing his hands on his head.

“What the hell are you talking about?!” Hajime questioned.

“Y-You see, I can make things blue and I-- AH!” Papyrus jolted back as a robot attempted to slash his face. Hajime rushed over and shot the bear again.

“Please, just focus.” Hajime gave him an annoyed look.

“I am!” Papyrus retaliated. “Hajime, behind you!”

Before Hajime could react, Papyrus had pushed him aside to safety and he dealt with the Monokuma himself, this time successfully destroying it with another bone.

“Come! Let’s get out of here!” Papyrus then grabbed Hajime’s hand and dragged him out of the ambush, turning a few corners until the robot’s were out of sight and surely not following them. Once Papyrus let go, Hajime bent down and placed his hands on his knees, panting. This was way too much to let any coherent thoughts process right now. That felt like such a drag, and yet here they were, scratch free.

“Are you alright, Hajime?” Papyrus looked down at him.

Hajime arched back up. “Yeah, I’m fine…” And then his thoughts came back to him. “No, no, what the hell was that?!”

“What was what?”

“You… You literally ran into a hoard of Monokumas! What were you even thinking?!” Hajime pointed a firm finger at him.

“What do you mean? I was simply doing what I did before!” Papyrus argued. “And we helped each other out, didn’t we?”

“But-- But only because I had no idea what you were doing! We could’ve gotten hurt, you know!” Hajime had no clue what was going on inside this skeleton’s head. Did skeletons even have brains?

“But we didn’t!”

“That’s not the point! Just--!” Hajime sighed. “Just don’t do that again without telling me, okay?”

“...Alright. My apologies.” Papyrus placed a hand on his chest. Hajime’s face softened as he nodded in affirmation. Perhaps Papyrus was just the eager type.

That’s what he would’ve thought if Papyrus hadn’t blatantly done it again. And again. And again.

What was with this guy? When Hajime said to tell him before he tried anything, he didn't expect Papyrus to literally rush past him with an "I'm going to to attack them!" This was becoming ridiculous, probably more so than what Hajime ever had to deal with before. Before long, it had become dark, the red sky simmering down into a blood coated easel in the sky. Thankfully, they hadn't ran into any Monokumas for a while, and Hajime could finally calm down a little.

"Hajime?" Papyrus broke the prolonged silence.

"Yeah?"

"It's becoming rather dark. Do you wish to keep travelling on?"

That was a good question actually. It wasn't the safest bet to keep going in the dark, and sooner or later they would need some form of rest. "Actually, now that you mention it, we should probably try and find a--"

"HELP! SOMEONE, HELP ME!"

Both Hajime and Papyrus froze as a scream echoed vividly into the street. From what Hajime could make out, it sounded like a woman who was in dire distress. He looked toward Papyrus, and they silently agreed to check out the source of the sound.

Running down the street, the two turned yet another corner to see a party of Monokumas circling around a red haired lady, defenseless and holding herself in panic. She was in trouble. So, Hajime and Papyrus got to work: one Monokuma shot by a bullet, another penetrated by a bone. It was still ungodly uncoordinated, and there was still bickering present between them, but they soon cleared off the robots. Wiping his brow, Hajime looked toward the woman, who now relaxed her body as her face washed over with relief.

"Oh, thank god!" She resounded. "Thank you for saving me! I don't know what the hell I would've done if you two didn't show up." Upon closer inspection, the woman's hair appeared to be slightly matted, and her teal blouse was creased and torn at the edges.

“There is no need to thank us, human!” Papyrus assured. The woman raised a brow at how Papyrus referred to her, and Hajime mentally winced.

“Uh, don’t worry about it,” Hajime started, “We were passing by when we heard you.”

“What a coincidence, huh? And here I thought these little bastards would be the end of me. Oh, where are my manners? I’m Lois.” The woman, Lois, introduced herself with a humble smile.

“I am Papyrus, and this is my partner, Hajime!” Papyrus gestured to Hajime accordingly. Hajime faltered -- did he really have to word it like *that* ? “We were both victims in those motive videos you may have heard of. We’re trying to rescue more people like us!”

“Motive videos? Oh my god, I thought I was the only one!” Lois put a hand to her forehead. “There’s really more?”

“There were 16 videos to be exact.” Hajime explained. “The number of people per video may be greater than we know, though.”

“But this is such a great unexpected meeting! You should join us -- Hajime here works for people who will help us!” Papyrus beamed.

“You do? Like the CIA?” Lois asked.

“No, not… that. Uh, it’s an organisation more specialised for this kind of situation we’re in.” Hajime awkwardly replied.

“Well whatever it is, it’ll be better than out here. And you two actually have weapons, or, whatever the hell you used back there.” Lois agreed to the offer. Papyrus grinned, however

Hajime was still concerned about one thing: just who’s motive video was Lois supposed to be for?

“However, since it is getting dark, perhaps we should search for somewhere to sleep for the night.” Papyrus pointed out.

“Oh, I know where we could go. There’s a hospital a few blocks away from here. I was hiding in there for a while, it’s not in as bad shape as the other buildings.” Lois suggested. “I can show you the way.”

“Really? Splendid!” Papyrus placed his hands together, and Hajime simply nodded. They followed Lois through the streets in silence. Well, mostly silence: Papyrus was eager to talk again, commenting on all the little things he saw. Hajime really didn’t mind at this point, the noise was much more comforting than the dreaded silence that loomed around the city. Lois, on the other hand, glanced at Papyrus with a mix of confusion and irritation. Hajime didn’t really fancy such a telling reaction, but Papyrus didn’t seem to notice.

Eventually, they reached the abandoned hospital, and Lois led them inside. It was airy and wide, probably because Hajime was more used to visiting busy hospitals with patients and doctors scattered around the halls. This felt more like something out of a horror movie, where a potential ghoul or zombie would jump out from a doorway. Well, it could potentially still happen, but just in the form of a robotic murderous bear. If Hajime had to pick out one positive thing to calm his nerves, it would be the pale blue paint faded on the walls.

“This looks like a clean enough room to stay in.” Lois motioned towards one of the many patient rooms they happened to cross. The three walked inside, and sure enough, the room gave the impression of a regular patient room, despair apocalypse or not. In a way, Hajime could disconnect himself with the chaos outside as if this room was in another plane of existence. Although, too much wishful thinking like that would cloud his vision of the reality he needed to be grounded in.

Focusing back, the only problem that arose in Hajime’s mind with the room was the presence of only two beds. The other two didn’t seem to notice, however, as Lois sat herself on the edge of one, and Papyrus did the same on the opposite bed, patting the space beside him for Hajime to join them. Hajime stood still for a moment, then finally decided to sit down.

“Um, so…” He began, not really sure on what to say, “How long have you been hiding here?”

“For a while, actually. Ever since I woke up in this city, those bears have been around every damn corner I turn. At one point I lost a herd by coming in here, and found that it wasn’t too bad.” Lois felt the thin sheets of the bed as she solemnly spoke her story.

“Did you also wake up alone?” Papyrus questioned.

“Yeah. Well it’s not like I wanted to. I have a family, you know.”

“A family?” Hajime raised a brow.

“I’m a mother, couldn’t you tell?” Lois leaned back a little. “I have three beautiful kids -- or was it two? -- and a loving husband and dog. One of them is only three, oh, my poor baby.” She griefed. Hajime slowly paused. That family sounded familiar.

“I am so sorry to hear that,” Papyrus sympathised, “Oh, then who were you forced to make your video for?”

Lois leaned back up. “It was actually my husband, Peter.”

Hajime froze. Peter? Peter Griffin? The Peter Griffin from the 69th killing game?

The same Peter Griffin that Nagito and Sans murdered?

This was bad. So, so bad. Lois was literally talking to the brother of the killer of her husband. This felt so wrong. Hajime felt his stomach churn in panic.

“Oh… Well, I’m sure your husband is trying his hardest to live for you and his children!” Papyrus stuck his thumb up. Lois didn’t respond, instead giving him a cold look.

“Actually… Peter is dead. He was killed.” Lois bluntly stated, looking away from the two as if she was offended by them from the sight alone. Hajime would’ve thought it was rude if not for the overarching confirmation in his mind that Lois knew that Peter died. Would she soon connect the dots about the similarity of his killer to a certain someone sat next to him? No, surely not. Just because they were both skeletons didn’t mean she could jump to conclusions, right?

“I didn’t watch it, but I heard that’s what happened. At least I know his killers.” *Killers* . And that confirmed it. Hajime hoped his subtly trembling hands weren’t noticeable. However, Lois looked as if she didn’t want to converse about this topic anymore, understandably so, and Hajime felt a wave of relief wash over him.

Maybe this would never get brought up again and they would all continue on like this was just a passing thought.

“If it makes you feel any better, I am also concerned for the whereabouts of my brother, Sans. Perhaps he will carry on his passing.”

Hajime almost stopped breathing.

Lois turned sharply back to the two.

“What… What did you say?”

Oh god.

“Oh, I was talking about who I was made to talk about in my video. Sans!”

Oh god.

“S...Sans…? He’s… your brother?” Lois stammered, her expression blank.

“Yes!” Papyrus declared. “I am just so worried about him in that… ‘game’ thingy.”

Papyrus please stop talking--

“...Y-You…” Lois murmured.

“Huh, what was that--”

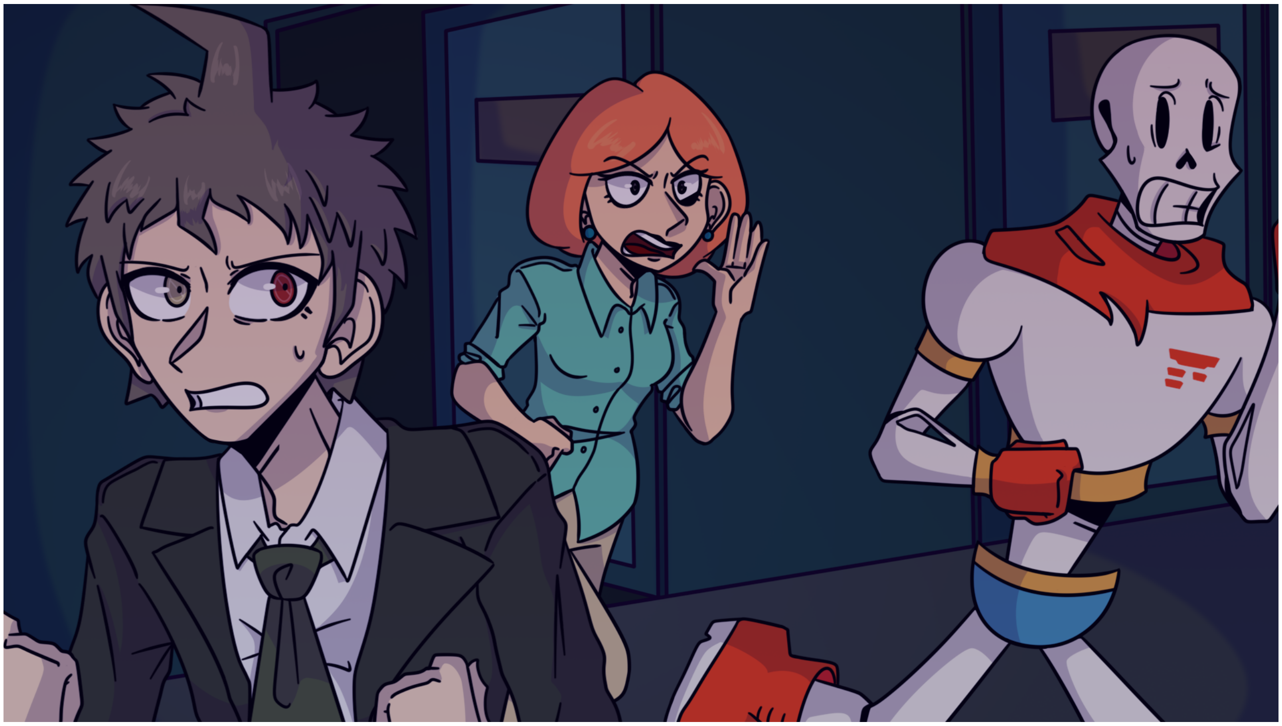
“YOU!” She screamed. “YOU KILLED PETER! YOU-- YOU LET THIS HAPPEN YOU ASSHOLES!”

“W-What?!” Papyrus flinched back. Hajime gripped the hospital bed sheets as he felt his body scream at him to get up.

“YOU TWO! YOU KNOW THEM, DON’T YOU? YOU… YOU LET PETER DIE!” Lois continued to explode in a fit of rage.

“I-I don’t understand what you’re talking about what do you--”

“ARGH--!” The moment Lois hurled herself towards the two, Hajime’s adrenaline kicked in and he grabbed Papyrus’ arm as he made a run for it towards the door. Crap crap crap this was bad this was bad. He flung Papyrus out the room as he followed suit, the two fleeing in different directions as they heard monstrous yelling getting closer behind them.



“GET BACK HERE! YOU’RE GOING TO PAY FOR WHAT YOU FUCKING CONDONED!”

All Hajime knew was to run, and run fast. Sure he had a weapon, but under the influence of seething anger, people’s power could be unpredictably unlimited. So it was best to just run away than be sorry. Unfortunately, he couldn’t remember where the entrance to the hospital was, on the account of the fact that he took a turn he didn’t quite remember them taking previously. He was now lost in this hospital, being chased by a vengeful wife god knows how close behind. And he had no idea where Papyrus went, either.

Sprinting down an unfamiliar hall, Hajime caught sight of a staircase, and decided to go with his gut. He turned sharply on his heel and started to climb the stairs. Maybe there would be a good place to hide higher up. Maybe not. But it was better than running around in circles and potentially meeting face to face with Lois. Up the first case, then the second; Hajime continued to ascend upwards into the hospital. It felt like he was climbing for ages -- his legs started to get fatigued with his fading adrenaline kick.

Eventually, however, Hajime was met with a door. Busting it open, Hajime was immediately hit with a cold breeze as he realised he had somehow made it onto the roof of the hospital. It brushed past his face like a razor, but he had little time to care. This was bad, wasn’t it? There wasn’t anywhere to go from here, unless there was some emergency ladder connected to the side of the building. That was probably a good hope, right? Whipping his head every which way, Hajime attempted to frantically survey the rooftop.

Until a pair of arms wrapped around his neck, and that hope crushed into two.

“Here you are, you bastard!” Hajime heard a sick and gravelly voice snarl against his ear as he was pulled backwards into an awkward choke hold. He sputtered out, hands immediately reaching for the arms wrapped around his airway, trying to claw at them with his nails.

“G-Get off me…!” Hajime gasped out, feeling the pressure narrow against his neck. He felt cold beads of sweat trail down his forehead as he continued to struggle against the woman with a horrifying iron grip.

“NO! You were friends with that other kid, weren’t you?” Lois sneered, making Hajime recoil. Surely she was just assuming that, right? Hajime never mentioned anything about Nagito. She was so crazy to make a correct assumption that Hajime was literally going to die because of it.

He was going to die?

Hajime writhed harder, and yet his arms started to become weak. He almost felt dazed, woozy. He wanted to stop. He wanted to rest. He wanted to pass out. Oh god. Oh god please this was it wasn’t it?

He could almost see that white sea and sand blinding his vision again.

“GET OFF HIM!”

What?

Suddenly, the arms locked around Hajime guaranteeing his funeral were no more, and he stumbled forward as he held onto his neck, choking and wheezing on his own air as he inhaled some of the deepest breaths of his life. After gaining some sort of coherent rhythm over his breathing again, Hajime glanced up to figure out what just happened.

There stood Papyrus, who had just shoved Lois away from strangling Hajime.

And Lois, stammering backwards over the push.

“You… You bitch! What the hell are you doing…?!” She didn’t sound like a caring mother in the slightest anymore; more like an imp from the deaths of hell, voice laced with ash and malice.

Papyrus scowled at her. “Me?! What were YOU doing?! You were-- Wait! Watch out for the--”

Lois had still been tripping backwards. She never stopped.

Even when she hit the edge of the building.

Hajime watched, dazed, as her backfoot slipped over the edge.

And she was no more to be seen.

“AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH--!” A scream from the depths of a sullen and grasping voice rang out into the night, drowning out more and more until nothing else could be heard, just the deadly quiet of the rooftop. It sounded like she was falling forever, but surely she hit the ground. It’s not like Hajime wanted to check.

It’s not like Hajime wanted to do anything after this.

He felt his own feet start to stumble back, until Hajime’s whole body decided to involuntarily collapse down. That would have been the case, although, if not for a pair of arms -- a nicer pair of arms -- catching him in his defeated fall. The boney arms held him firm, not daring to force him up straight just yet.

After a few beats, Hajime decided to turn his head up to meet Papyrus. He was trembling too, clearly in his arms, but he also seemed to be holding back quivers from his entire body. Hajime didn't know if Papyrus had ever experienced witnessing a death, especially one to this degree, he just didn't know at all. And yet, he felt as if he knew Papyrus more than he ever did before. Papyrus noticed Hajime looking at him, and creased his brow in concern.

"A-Are you okay, Hajime?" His voice came out with a short tremor, it was understandable of course.

"Y-Yeah, I'm--I'm alright…" But so did Hajime, almost jumping over his own words. Slowly, but with support from Papyrus, Hajime lifted himself back to normal height. His feet felt heavy to stand upon. He turned toward Papyrus. "Thank you, for saving my back there… I really owe it to you. I thought I was gonna…" He trailed off, unsure if he wanted to finish such a sentence.

"It is… no problem. If I'm being honest, I have not a clue in the slightest as to why she started to attack us." Papyrus placed his hands on his hips as he looked to the floor. Then, he looked back up at Hajime. "You were in trouble, I needed to help you. It is the duty of a royal guard. And from now on, I'll swear to protect you, Hajime." He flashed a small smile.

"Papyrus, I… thank you. I'll, uh, help to protect you as well. Because we're… friends, right?" Hajime tried a smile back. Papyrus stared at him for a while, eyes wide, and Hajime grew confused. And then suddenly his face changed to one of pure joy as he rushed over to embrace Hajime in a not-so-light hug.

"Friends? We're friends?? Oh, Hajime, we're really friends now, are we? Wowie, I'm so happy to hear that!" Papyrus gushed as he squeezed Hajime. Hajime, while ignoring the feeling of his chest being contorted, awkwardly stood there as he received the one-sided hug. It was the least he could let Papyrus do after saving him. Soon, Papyrus let go, giving Hajime space to breathe once again.

"Shall we go back inside? It's awfully dark now." Papyrus suggested.

Hajime nodded. “Yeah. It’s better if we do that.”

The two spun back around to the rooftop door, and headed inside together. Somehow, they were going to find their way back to the patient room, and Hajime could finally sleep the unreal-seeming day off. But what was most important was that he was okay. Shaken, but okay. Sure, he started the day off clueless, and to some extent he still felt the same way, except things could change so quickly in so little time, and it really did. Hajime, for a moment, glanced over at Papyrus.

Maybe things may not be so bad with his new partner.

* * *

“Hehehe… What a beautiful city. She wasn’t lying when she said it was pretty, huh? The imperfections and the chaos make it wonderful!” A half-pint flower chirped from a chair much larger than she was. She clasped her hands together and sighed melodramatically.

“I can’t wait to ruin it further. What do you think?”

She turned toward the cat next to her.

“Me neither. I mean, this city *is* pretty cute, but, it has room for improvement under your guide.” The cat swished her tail in delight.

The flower laughed. “Aw, you really think so? You’re so nice! This is why you’re my favourite forever!” She then swivelled her chair around. There were three more figures. “You hear that? She’s my favourite. Don’t you want to work hard to be my favourites too?”

“Of course!” One of the figures proclaimed, brushing her pink hair aside. “I’m doing this all for you, I mean, I’m basically your second favourite, right?”

“Well…” The flower trilled on her syllable.

Another one of the figures simply hummed, his shoulder hunched and back brooding.

“Ahaha, you’re so funny!” The flower clapped. She then turned to the last figure. “And you?”

The last figure didn’t seem to hear her. He was too fixated on a small monitor, eyes glued to its contents. He cooed and giggled under his breath excitedly.

“...Whatever.” The flower rotated her chair back to the front, looking up at the many monitors on the wall displaying pictures of the city’s camera feed. “Ah, I can’t believe it. Soon, everyone will know my name.”

She smiled, the corners of her mouth curling around her cheeks.

“Sunny Funny, Miku’s new successor.”

Chapter End Notes

Well... didn't we start off with a bang or what?

LOOK THERE'S JUST ONE LESS FAMILY GUY IN THIS WORLD WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS--
Anyway, yes! You have been now introduced to the main duo! No it's totally not reverse sansmaeda what're you talking about--

I hope you enjoyed this first chapter, cuz I'm really excited to continue on with this !! <3

Chapter 2: A Bridge to Desperation

Chapter Notes

> Yo, yo, yo
> I'm back, I've got angst and dip
> Is is okay to obsess over my own fanfic? Because I constantly think about it all week ahdjskaj
> Well, anyways, let's see where our duo will face next... !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What are you going to do about this?”

“Will they be rescued?”

“How about the streets? Will they be safe to walk on?”

Questions. A multitude of questions bombarded the room. A sea of voices riling over each other in an uncoordinated mess of inquisitive concern and interest. Some voices cared deeply about what they were asking; they were scared for their lost friends and family. Some voices cared little for what they were saying; what was more important to them was being able to transfer the answer for publicity. But it was hard to decipher which voice was being legitimate as each kept ringing over each other constantly.

And at this point Peach couldn’t handle the numbers.

“What happened to the killing game? I heard it ended with the mastermind dying!” A loud voice spoke up.

Peach cleared her throat as she went to answer. “W-Well, yes, the killing game has come to a conclusion, but--”

“What about the survivors? Are they alive? Will you be rescuing them?” Another voice began.

“The survivors? Ah, yes, we have identified most of them but we’re still trying to--”

“We can’t live like this! The streets aren’t safe! How will we overcome the damage done by Miku?!” A harsher voice interjected.

“That, u-um, has been a very important topic that we’ve been going over for a while b-but I can’t disclose the entire--”

More voices started to erupt over each other again, and flashes from cameras started to distract Peach a lot more than usual. Why did they need so many pictures, again? Not that she wanted to be rude, but what news outlet was still circulating without damage? Oh how she missed giving simple speeches to her toads.

“Excuse me,” A voice, a familiar voice, beside Peach finally shouted loudly into the crowd, “But these questions are unnecessary. All information about the killing game is still being processed by our higher branches. There is nothing you should be concerned about if we have not disclosed it. Any and all further information will stay confidential.”

Peach glanced over. The man she had been working with for the past few weeks. He was awfully good at his job. Much less passive than she was, but a lot more forceful and to an extent rude. But it was what was needed here: someone to tell these people to shut up. Because it would only perpetuate a cycle of stress Peach was not accustomed to.

“Munakata…” She softly cautioned. He looked back at her, and nodded sharply with his usual stoic face.

“But what about the survivors? You *need* to save them! One of them is a member of your organisation!” A further voice demanded.

“We are currently making arrangements to locate and rescue the survivors, and have been ever since we received news of their escape. That is all we will disclose.” Munakata replied firmly.

Peach looked down at the multitude of microphones attached to the podium. They were going to rescue the survivors, of course she knew that. Yet, she was glad, ecstatic even. She just wanted them to be safe, that was all. Especially since one of them was a particular plumber that she desperately wanted to see once again.

Facing back up into the mass of faces, Peach matched a similar expression to Munakata, although with a confident smile. “We will make sure they are safely attended to before we place our attention on anything further. However, our next step will then be to locate more victims, especially on the streets. The population’s wellbeing is the most important factor to us.”

Some people started to cheer, some others breathed a sigh of relief. If there was one thing Peach knew she could do, was that she could assure happiness in others. As a monarch it was her duty to care for her people after all. She peeked back at Munakata for assurance on her speech, and he gave another assertive nod.

“This conference is over,” He started up again. “Peach and I have more important matters to attend to. Do not harass any further Future Foundation members or you will be escorted out of the facility.” Munakata turned on his heel to leave, and Peach quickly followed him after giving a short goodbye bow to the crowd.

Brushing down her pencil skirt, Peach exhaled quietly. Thank Luma that was over. But now, she knew they really had to focus on the task at hand, as everyone was counting on them.

She had to be the one to do the rescuing this time.

* * *

Light gently seeped through Hajime’s eyelids as he started to awaken into consciousness. He let his hand slip up to his face as he rubbed one eye. Turning his head up to the ceiling, he groaned as he finally fluttered his eyes open.

Only to see Papyrus right up close and personal in his face.

“Good morning, Hajime!”

“WHAAA--?!” Hajime yelled as his eyes flew wide open and his body jolted upwards in terror. In doing so, his forehead crashed into Papyrus’, sending him stumbling backwards a few steps.

“O-Owch!” Papyrus rubbed his head.

“What the hell were you doing?!” Hajime fumed, placing a hand on his own head where there was now a mild ringing throb.

“Huh? I was just waking you up! We have a task to do, don’t we?” Papyrus declared, pointing his index finger up in the air.

Hajime remained silent for a few beats, making a frustrated grunt before swinging his legs over the edge of the hospital bed. “I know… But…” And then the memories of yesterday came flooding back into his mind. The whole ordeal with Lois had shaken him to the point where it was more than difficult to sleep. At one point he had lucidly gotten out of bed just to stare out the window into the streets below. He even remembered checking on Papyrus to see him sleeping soundly, almost worry-free. Oh how he envied that moment. Hajime didn’t remember when exactly he eventually gave into sleep, but it couldn’t have been too long ago considering how heavy his eyelids felt now that he really thought about it.

“Hajime, I would advise the both of us to pay no further attention to the ordeal we experienced yesterday.” Papyrus began, snapping Hajime back to reality. “It was… furthest from pleasant, b-but we have people to save, correct? Then, we must persevere for their sake!”

“And what if we run into another Lois?” Hajime just audibly retaliated.

“Maybe you should have more confidence in people!” Papyrus simply stated back, and Hajime really couldn’t follow his line of logic in his half-asleep state. Then again, did he really ever understand what Papyrus said sober either?

“Sure…” Is all he replied with as he tightened his tie a little and grabbed his hacking gun. Standing up, he and Papyrus exited the patient room and attempted to navigate their way to the reception. Despite the morning glow providing light down the halls, it was still insanely impossible to find their way around. Papyrus kept insisting they should take a left, and Hajime kept contemplating if they had already passed that one operating room. The two almost stopped to jeer at each other over taking three rights, but stopped as Hajime pointed to a hall that led directly to the hospital reception. Papyrus praised that it wasn’t so hard after all, but Hajime still wasn’t all that impressed.

However, before Papyrus could stride out of the entrance, Hajime called out to him.

“Hey, doesn’t it seem a bit pointless to start walking around aimlessly again?”

“Well, I suppose so. But it’s not like we have a choice, right? Perhaps the right path will make itself apparent as we--”

“No, I mean… Shouldn’t we at least get a map or something?” Hajime cut him off.

“Where would we ever find a map?” Papyrus questioned. Hajime pointed to a stack of leaflets on the reception counter. “Oh.”

Picking up the leaflet on top of the pile, Hajime unfolded it to reveal a large map of the supposed city they were in. Papyrus walked over to him and peered over his shoulder, however a bit to close as Hajime could practically hear his breathing against his ear.

“Do you mind?” He twisted his head towards Papyrus as he raised an irritated brow.

“Oh, not at all!” Papyrus absentmindedly replied with a smile. Hajime fought back the urge to roll his eyes. Instead, he looked back at the map to get a grasp of their general location.

“So, this is where we are now,” Hajime pointed towards a building labelled with a star and an obvious ‘you are here’ notice, “Which means we’re… Oh. We’re pretty close to the sea? What?” Hajime stared harder at the map to make sure the mass of blue was definitely labelled as the ocean.

“And you’re proposing we gather the survivors on a boat? Yes, I do believe that’s a good idea!” Papyrus rambled out of nowhere.

“What? No, that’s… Does this mean we’re in a coastal town? No, hang on, these look like ports so… God, where the hell are we?” Hajime furrowed his brows. The longer he stared at this map the more he felt he was disassociating with reality. Just how screwed up were their worlds?

“How about this long thing over here?” Papyrus pointed at a bridge near their location. “It seems to be going off the map… Perhaps we need to turn it over?”

“No, that’s a bridge. It’s obviously leading off of the city to somewhere else.” Hajime corrected. And then he paused. “Hang on… That’s not a bad idea actually. It’s close, and if anything, it should lead us out of the city.”

“But how about the other survivors?”

“Papyrus, we don’t… How about we just check it out, okay?” Hajime stopped himself from going on a tangent about this unnecessary ‘survivor’ talk.

“Hm, I suppose we should!” Papyrus raised a fist. “Lead the way, Hajime!”

Finally, they were out of the hospital they weren’t soon to return to, and walking down the ruined streets like yesterday. Hajime kept his guard up strong, tightly holding onto his hacking gun in the hopes that if a potential Monokuma were to strike, he would be ready to take it down. He felt much more prepared having actual directions to follow, so at least that was one less thing to worry about.

Until he got the sharp presence of being followed, and yet another problem stacked onto his initial ones.

The feeling was small and subtle, yet he could clearly not deny that something or someone was watching them. Surely it wasn't paranoia, or else he would be constantly tearing his hair out over the despair of Monokuma mobs. No, this feeling was certain.

Upon inspecting Papyrus beside him, he didn't seem to think the same, or at least he didn't seem so from his carefree expression. Hajime didn't want to necessarily bring up the potential threat of a stalker out of the blue and suffer Papyrus freaking out and causing unwanted attention to rise. Rather, he decided to play along when Papyrus struck up another conversation.

"Hajime, I've been meaning to ask you this, but, why do you work for Future Foundation?" He inquired.

Hajime pondered for a moment, checking down an alleyway they happened to pass before answering. "Well, it wasn't exactly my choice. They saved me, or at least a few of the members did, and as they requested for my help I couldn't not accept."

Papyrus perked up. "They requested *your* help? Do you have something they need?"

"That…" Hajime didn't know how to explain it without warranting a full disclosure on the ins and outs. "My, uh, talents were suited for their line of work."

"What sort of talents?" There was a flash of interest in Papyrus' eyes, and Hajime really didn't favour the pressure.

“Y’know, uh… W-What were you saying about that guard thing again?” Hajime briskly changed the subject, flicking his eyes down to his weapon.

“Oh, you mean the Royal Guard! Ah, I’m happy you’re interested, Hajime! You see…” As Papyrus started to joyfully ramble about his passion, Hajime sighed. It’s not like Papyrus didn’t deserve to know about his Ultimate Talents, however he would probably question how Hajime got them in the first place. And that was the conversation he really didn’t want to have.

While Hajime was deep in thought and Papyrus deep in conversation, they hadn’t realised the street they turned onto was littered in Monokumas until they heard a shrill laugh erupt from a few. The two braced to fight them off, waiting for a couple of the robots to start charging forward so they could attack with a better aim. Despite their efforts, the Monokumas seemed to come in quite a larger concentration than they had previously dealt with.

“This is way too much!” Hajime exclaimed as he maneuvered closer towards Papyrus who was dealing with his own herd. “We need to get out of here.”

“Where should we go?” Papyrus asked in a hurry.

“How about… Ah, over there!” Hajime pointed over to an alleyway that appeared to trail quite far down. Together, they started to flee from the Monokumas, picking up the pace as they crossed into the narrow alleyway. It turned out to be much longer than they thought, with connecting pathways leading to god knows where; it wasn’t like Hajime had the time to pull out the map and check. At least they could redirect themselves after successfully escaping the commotion. Although, the sound of Monokumas had fizzled out by now, and that concluded that they probably weren’t being chased anymore.

“Hajime, wait!” Papyrus called out as Hajime halted on his heel and turned to look back at where Papyrus had stopped.

“What?!”

“Look down here -- I believed to have spotted something!” Papyrus gestured down one of the alleyway paths that lead to a dead end. Hajime frustratedly rushed over to take a look for himself.

“What, it’s just a Monokuma-- Wait. Why’s there only one? What’s it doing?” Hajime peered further down the path, confused.

“I do not know. Should we investigate?” Papyrus turned to Hajime.

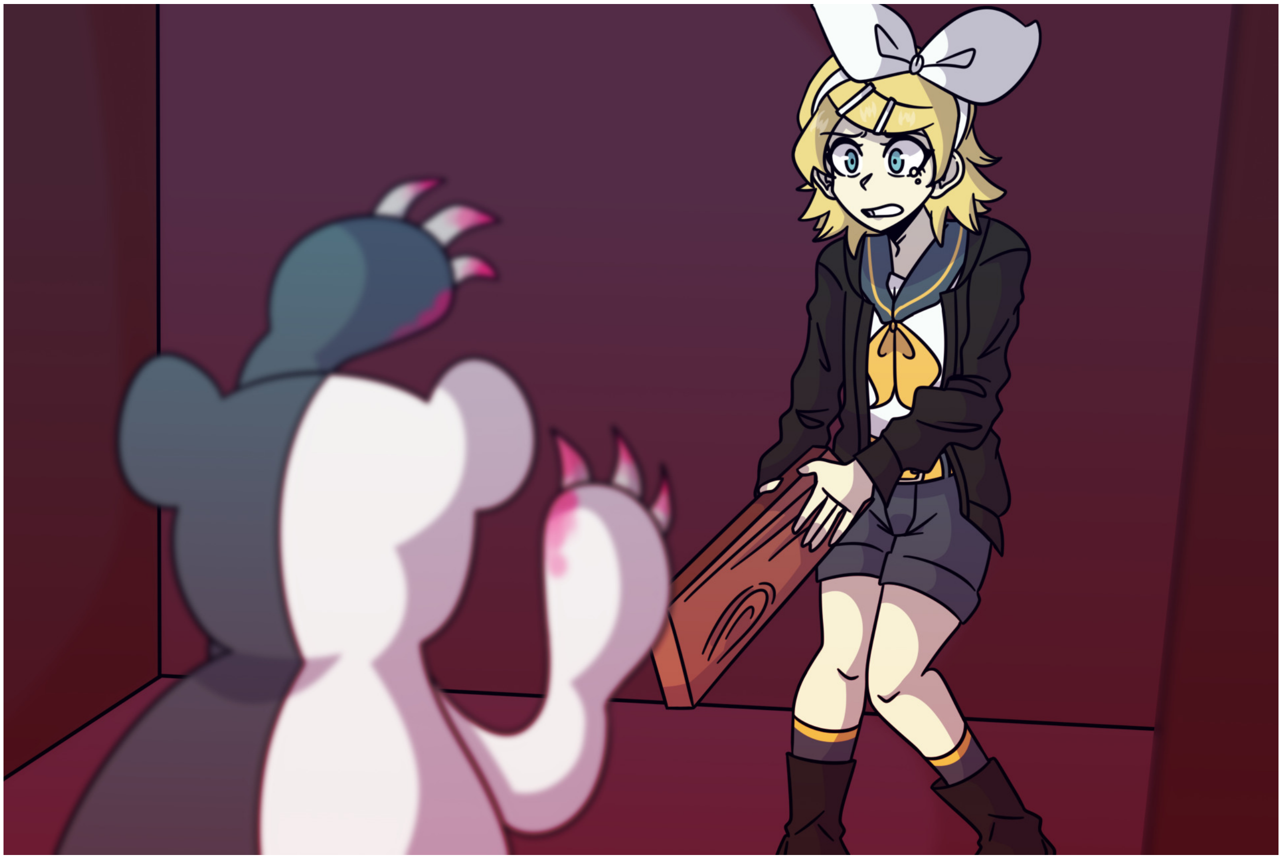
Hajime looked at him. “I don’t see why we should--”

“Leave me alone! Please! D-Don’t hurt me!”

Hajime and Papyrus faltered. That voice was new. From what Hajime could make of it, it was young and frightened, but somehow very soft and melodic. And one thing was for sure: it undoubtedly came from down the alleyway.

“Someone needs our help down there!” Papyrus proclaimed.

“Alright, but just be cautious about it.” Hajime warned before the two dashed down the path. As they got closer, the sight became clearer: the Monokuma wasn’t alone, it was taunting someone, and that someone was a small blonde girl. She was wearing a sailor uniform and shorts combo under an oversized black jacket and boots. The girl was frantically fighting the Monokuma away with a stray plank of wood presumably from this very alley. The Monokuma kept fighting back with force, clawing the plank with a malicious smile.



The two came to a standstill a mere few feet away from the girl and robot, unsure on what to do. Obviously they needed to act fast, but how were they supposed to discuss anything without causing attention from the Monokuma?

Except that was what Papyrus exactly had in mind.

“Hey, you fiendish bear!” Papyrus yelled towards the Monokuma, who’s ears twitched as it twisted its head towards them in a jolting fashion. “Why don’t you pick on someone your own size?! Well, erm, we’re actually quite bigger than you but what I meant to say was--”

“Papyrus!” Hajime shouted as he leaped in front of Papyrus to shoot the oncoming Monokuma in the eye. It flipped backwards, and laid destroyed on the ground.

“Was that really your plan?” He jeered, glancing at Papyrus.

Papyrus shot a half-sided smile. “It worked, didn’t it?”

“U-Um…” The girl’s sudden interception made the two cease their bickering as they looked towards her. The three stared at one another for a moment, the girl’s eyes widening in eventual panic and fear as she hunched up. “ *Ahh* …”

“Human, please, do not worry!” Papyrus quickly assured and rushed closer to her. “We are here to save you!”

“H-Huh?!” The girl yelped as she jumped back.

“Don’t corner her, that’s creepy.” Hajime scolded Papyrus, who stopped in his tracks in guilt. Hajime slowly walked over to the girl. “But he’s right. You’re safe now, okay?”

The girl looked up at Hajime, and gradually nodded in understanding.

“What’s your name?” He then asked.

“R-Rin… Rin Kagamine.” The girl muttered.

“And, Rin, are you by any chance familiar with the motive videos?” Papyrus queried.

“Huh, the motive videos? Yeah, um, I was forced to be in one. You know about them too?” Rin started to ginger up.

“We were both made to film one too.” Hajime explained. And then, learning his lesson from last time, decided to quickly speak up again. “Who exactly were you made to talk about?”

“Well,” Rin hesitantly began, “...Miku.”

Hajime paused, brows furrowing. “Hang on, Miku? Hatsune Miku?”

“Who’s Hat-suit Michael?” Papyrus obliviously questioned.

“ *Hatsune Miku* .” Hajime berated. “She was the mastermind behind the 69th killing game, and who threw us into this entire tragedy. But Rin, how were you forced to make a video for Miku? Do you know her or something?”

Rin wavered, fiddling with her jacket sleeve. “I know it sounds bad, but please hear me out! We were only forced to make the motive video for her amusement. You see, we had no idea about Miku’s intentions to do all this until it happened. It was all so sudden -- I kinda have trouble remembering it all really.”

“Who’s ‘we’?” Papyrus asked.

“My friends and my brother, Len. I got separated from them in this city, I’m sure of it! I don’t know where they are, but I’ve been looking for them ever since and…” Rin faltered, and Hajime and Papyrus looked at each other in concern. “And that was when I spotted you two.”

“You did?!” Papyrus gasped.

“Uh-huh. I kinda followed you for a while ‘cuz you were the first people I’ve seen in this city that wasn’t a robot trying to kill me.” Rin admitted. At least that explained why Hajime felt the presence of someone following them a while back. “Though, I sorta got… spotted by one of them which chased me away and cornered me here…” She glanced down to the floor again as she held back a sniffle.

“I-I just…” Her eyes started to become glossed over with tears. “I don’t know if I can do this anymore… I-I was almost…”

“Ah, h-hey! Please do not fret!” Papyrus insisted, putting his arms out as he knelt down to her level. “Everything from now on will be okay! For me and Hajime are searching for survivors like yourself!”

“H-Huh?” She wiped one eye with her sleeve.

Hajime sighed as he copied Papyrus and leant down as well. “It’s not like we’d leave you here alone after all this, right? And, don’t worry, we have a plan. We’re all going to be saved by Future Foundation: an organisation I work for.”

“We are…?” He nodded at her with a firm smile. “Then… I want to help too! I want to help save the people Miku hurt!” Rin flashed back a determined beam as she clenched her fists.

After helping Rin calm down, Hajime cited to her their current goal of locating the city’s bridge. The three left the alleyway, making sure there were no more Monokumas to be seen as they walked back onto the main streets again. Hajime, upon checking the map again, saw that they thankfully weren’t too far off course, and so continued to lead the group. Although, he was still pretty curious over Rin’s affiliation with Miku so decided to act upon his thoughts.

“Hey Rin, do you know anything about what’s going on here?” He asked. “Specifically about this city?”

“Um, if anything, most friends of the people from the killing game should be here, but I don’t know where. It’s really hard to find people from my experience.” Rin remarked.

“Well you’re definitely not alone on that one…”

And after that, Hajime didn’t have much else to say. Of course, he had quite a lot of questions circling his mind, but he knew better than to ask such a young girl who had obviously been betrayed by this tyrant who was once her friend. If what happened back at the alley wasn’t telling enough, he didn’t know what was. He noticed Papyrus continue the conversation over to something lighter -- something about their plans on saving people -- which Rin contently joined in on. As long as they were occupied, Hajime could focus on his thoughts and surroundings.

Not too long later, Hajime swore he caught a glimpse of the edge of the city, and sensed a rush of liberation once he realised they had arrived at the bridge. The street they were on opened up onto a crossroad that overlooked the rather calm ocean. The far-off waves lapped against the urbanised land, travelling far into the vast horizon line. And situated just between the sea and land was the bridge. Tall, broad, perhaps even boundless as it stretched far into the other side of what was hopefully their ticket out of here.

And thankfully it was still intact.

It would be pretty hopeless if it wasn't, wouldn't it?

"Thank god." Hajime sighed under his breath. He turned to the other two. "Well, here we are."

"Oh ho! And we didn't run into any of those monsters on the way." Papyrus resounded. Hajime hadn't thought about it too hard himself, but they really didn't bump into any Monokuma ambushes on their trek. It must just be a coincidence. "Will you be alright crossing this bridge Rin? ...Uh, Rin?"

Ignorant to Papyrus' question, Rin was staring intently into the bridge. Hajime tried to match her gaze, concerned about what she was seeing. "Hey, I think… I think I see somebody!" She exclaimed.

"You do?" Papyrus asked.

"Yeah… Yeah I do! It must be another survivor, right?"

"Well…" Hajime unsurely started, still focusing on the bridge. Then, he saw it: there was a figure standing in the middle of the bridge. From here, he couldn't make out any defining features, however they seemed to sport an average human physique. "There's definitely someone there, at least."

“They must be trying to escape the city by the bridge too!” Rin sang. “C’mon, we should go join them!” Instantly after, Rin was running towards the bridge with an almost spring in her step. Hajime was about to call out after her, but Papyrus was quick to chase after her himself, leaving Hajime alone. He groaned, quickly catching up to them himself. Unbeknownst to him, it was quite the journey across the bridge; it turned out to be a lot longer than he originally theorised. Eventually, he saw the figure come into clearance, and began to slow down into a jog as he managed to finally see what they looked like.

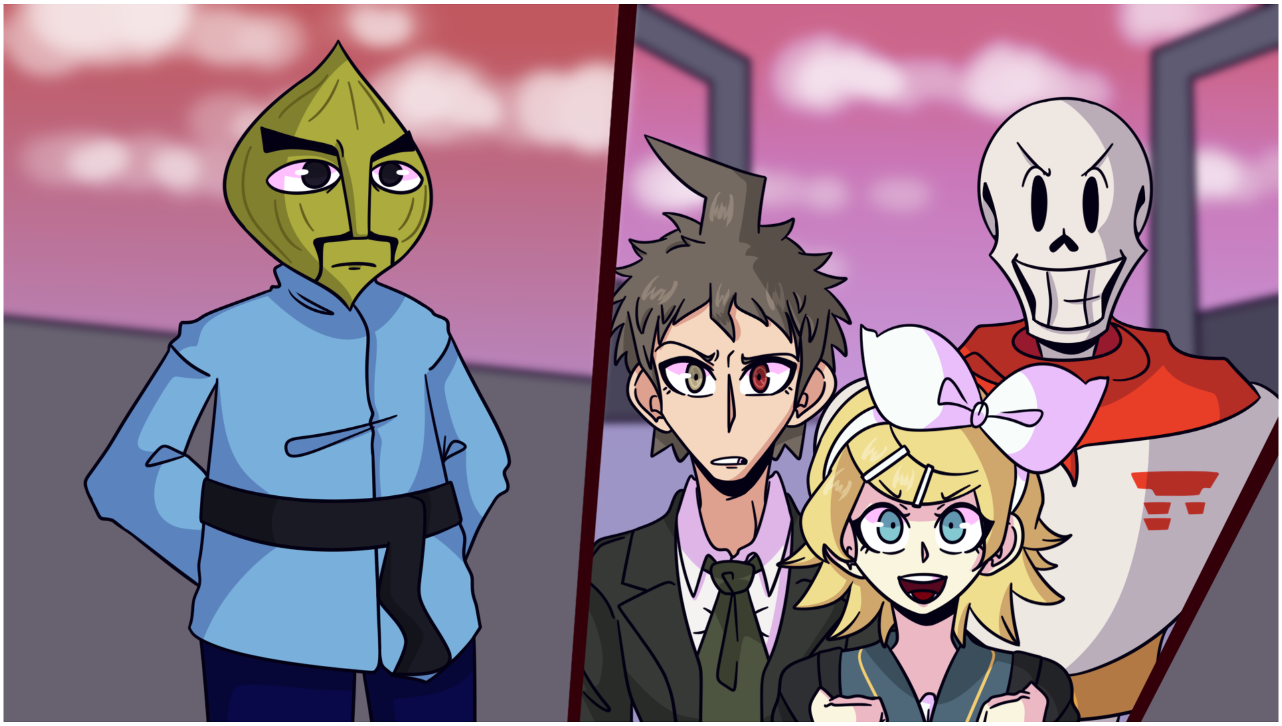
Hajime had to do a double take once he realised their head was a literal onion.

He wasn’t dreaming, was he? This wasn’t a human at all, well no, it still had the physique of a human, but it’s skin was pale green and papery like an onion, and it’s head sprouted white stick-like hairs. They were also wearing a blue karategi, something he hadn’t seen since probably elementary school where almost every kid was signed up for karate clubs. Despite the onion’s odd appearance, it honestly gave him a strange sense of comfortability.

Hajime stopped as he caught up to Rin and Papyrus, who both appeared a lot less concerned about the fact that this was an onion and more excited to find another potential survivor. He really had to admire their priorities to a degree.

“Hello! Are you okay, mister?” Rin called to them.

Upon hearing her voice, they turned around, Hajime noting their rather old-looking face.



“Hah!” The onion suddenly swapped their stance to a braced fighting position, his brow twitching. “Who goes there? Are you foes? I am trained to deal with sneak attacks.” If that was true, Hajime wondered why he didn’t hear them running up towards him.

“No, no, we’re not foes!” Rin waved her hands out and smiled. “We were trying to find our way out of the city, aren’t you here for the same reason?”

“Ah,” The onion cooled his state, “I see. You are trying to escape too.”

“Indeed we are! In fact, we are trying to find more survivors like ourselves too!” Papyrus declared.

“How noble of you.” He bowed. “You are truly far from what could be considered a foe. Therefore,” He arched his back straight up again and straightened his arms by his sides, “I am Tamanegi Sensei. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“Tamanegi…?” Hajime repeated quietly, baffled.

“It’s nice to meet you too!” Rin introduced back. “I’m Rin.”

“I am the Great Papyrus.” Papyrus added.

“And you, son?” Tamanegi turned to Hajime.

“Uh, Hajime… Say, how long have you been on this bridge for?” Hajime looked past him for signs of anything else. The bridge seemed to be completely empty, par from a few rouge traffic cones scattered around.

“Not too long. I have been travelling around this city in little time, avoiding the herds of bears that rampage across streets. On occasion I would have to fight back, but as a true master, one only had to deal small damage to make a big impact.” Tamanegi told them in an odd fashion that resembled the retelling of an old folk tale, which only brought more bewilderment to Hajime.

“Incredible!” Papyrus chirped. “I would love to see you in combat one day.”

Tamanegi nodded. “Perhaps another time, for now we have a city to escape. But, be cautious. We do not know what challenges lie beyond this point, perhaps some even harder than what was before us. I may be old, but I am experienced with handling the unexpected… except maybe casinos.” It was becoming obvious to Hajime that this guy enjoyed speeches just a bit too much. And what was the point about casinos exactly? However, if he really looked at it from face value, Tamanegi was simply cautioning them not to take this opportunity for granted, and he could respect that.

“So that means you’ll come with us?” Rin excitedly asked.

“It is necessary that we must stick together to overcome our situation.”

Rin tilted her head, then giggled. “I’m taking that as a yes.”

“Isn’t this great, Hajime?” Papyrus looked to Hajime with a hopeful grin.

“I… guess so.” He replied. To be completely honest, Hajime would rather just let Tamanegi come along than complain about it internally. But, that wasn’t the most pressing thought on his mind. No, what was more troubling was how *easy* this felt. Sure, maybe he was just thinking too hard, yet no matter how simple the task, the world always seemed to crush his luck. And here, it was the complete opposite. They were going to leave, contact Future Foundation and Hajime could finally get back to filing that report he was half-way finished with.

Clack .

What was that?

There was a clattering noise that passed directly below Hajime’s ears. Something had dropped onto the floor, or was it rolling? Hajime shot his eyes to the bridge floor, and noticed an object tumble towards Tamanegi, bumping against his bare foot. Tamanegi felt it himself, and looked down with a raised brow. It was round, and small, and caked in an oddly familiar black and white pattern.

Black and white?

Like… *Monokuma* ?

Hajime felt his heart skip a beat.

And then it started beeping: a harsh, high-pitched noise that slowly increased in frequency. Tamanegi gasped sharply, his eyes almost bloodshot in profound terror.

“Go! Stay back!” He commanded frantically to the three.

Rin jumped. “W-What--”

“NOW!”

The beeping had become so fast it was impossible to decipher where it stopped and began.

And then everything was white.

The bridge, the sky, the sea was coated in a light of white. A ringing, a strained trembling ringing bleared in Hajime’s ears. Where was he? What was going on? Why did his body feel so heavy?

He felt his entire body be pushed back ten, twenty feet backwards, crashing to the hard concrete with a thud that shot his nerves into a frenzy. Everything hurt, and yet nothing in particular hurt at the same time. His face was burning, as if smeared with ignited charcoal from a roaring fire. His hands felt the same too, blistered from the cracks in the ground.

But he couldn’t lie there -- he needed to get up.

Pulling himself helplessly into a sitting position, Hajime forced his eyes open to witness the aftermath of the impact. The bridge, what had happened to it? The entire frame was cracked and struggling to stay intact. He looked beside him: Papyrus and Rin were also on the ground, seeming to have just woken up as well. He wanted to say something to them, anything, but a crumbling sound snapped his attention back to the bridge in front of him.

A hefty chunk just mere metres away was falling into the water below. He watched, half-aware, as the chunk slammed into the ocean, causing a barrage of water to surge upwards to compensate for the collision, immediately raining back down as bullets of frozen salt-water. The three looked on in devastation.

What the hell?

“Hahaha…!”

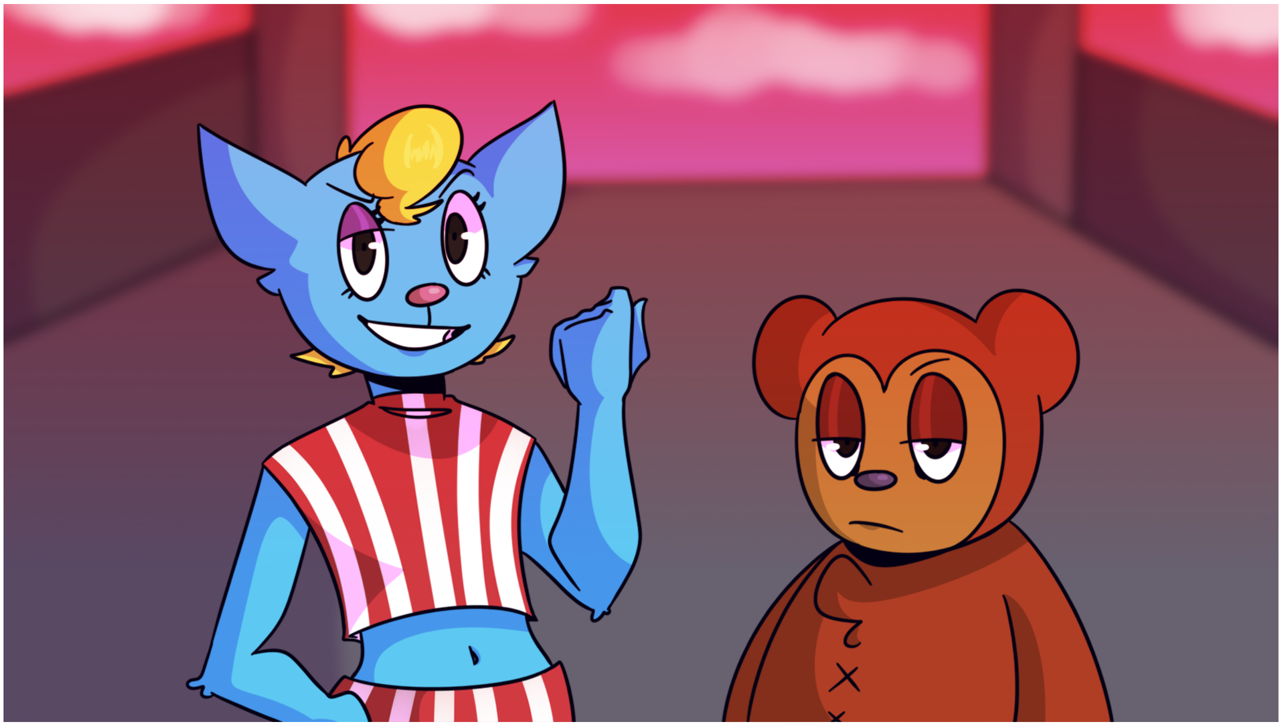
Hang on. Who was…?

Hajime regretted whipping his head behind him so fast, but his utter curiosity was too much to bear.

There was someone else. Two people, to be exact. No, not people. Animals. Animals that were wearing clothes and standing on two feet and how was Hajime not dreaming all of this right now?

Heaving himself off the ground, Hajime cursed under his breath as he held back the urge to whine about the sheer pain his body was in. “What the… hell…?” He gravelly tried to speak.

“Aw, how adorably pathetic.” A mature young voice rang out. Stepping forward, she revealed herself to be a blue cat. “I didn’t get you guys. Oh, but the look on your faces is way more rewarding actually. I think Sunny would like that more than if I just killed you.”



What? Who was this? What was she talking about? With the ringing mildly echoing in his ears, Hajime wasn’t ready to process the situation coherently yet. Hell, he hadn’t even seen

Papyrus and Rin get up next to him either.

“H-Huh…?” Rin squeaked.

“Did you like my bomb? I spent so much time on the design, you know. Our weapons have to be chic of course! Right, PJ?” The cat turned to the animal next to her: a brown bear. His eyelids drooped down further as he made a noise of mediocrity.

“Argh!” She abruptly kicked him harshly on the shin. The bear didn’t seem to react as much, eyes dazed over as if on another plane of existence. “Why did she think it was a good idea to have *you* of all people come with me? I know she can never be wrong, but you never appreciate the effort that goes into this crap!”

The three were frankly frozen, unsure on how to react. She looked towards them, and snickered wickedly.

“But it’s not like you guys were the reason I’m here. Frankly, my target was eliminated without a hitch! Haha! So much for those self-defense classes, or whatever…” The cat stretched out her paws to examine her nails.

“W-What…?” Papyrus tried to ask. Hajime looked around. The cat, the bear, Rin, Papyrus…

Tamanegi Sensei was nowhere to be seen.

“Serves him right, honestly. I can totally see what Sunny means, he was probably the worst so far. What a scumbag.” The cat placed her paw on her hip. The bear hummed in agreement. “Well--”

All at once, a rumbling noise shook the scene. The foundation of the bridge had started to crumble again, this time looking to collapse under its own weight any second from now. It quaked violently, and Hajime almost tripped slightly trying to stay upright.

“W-What’s going on?!” Rin exclaimed.

“Yeesh. Looks like the bridge wasn’t as stable as I thought.” The cat tsked. “Hm, oh well! My work here is done anyway. C’mon, PJ, let’s head back. Oh, and, best of luck you three!” She left on that note as she strided towards a scooter bike Hajime hadn’t noticed was there before. She and the bear hopped on and immediately drove away into the distance, becoming increasingly blurred until they could no longer be seen.

Hajime didn’t have time to process the sheer insanity of what just happened, instead more focused on the fact of the rapidly shaking bridge and falling concrete around them. “We need to get off this bridge, c’mon!”

Without pause the three started to dart hastily up the bridge, attempting not to trip over any large debris starting to block their path. It had become painful so quickly, Hajime’s limbs sore from the explosion earlier and definitely not ready to take on another life or death situation. A few metres later through the ashy fog and he finally caught sight of the city once again: the first time actually experiencing relief to see that damn city.

Jumping, the three landed near-perfectly back onto the city grounds right before the entire bridge crumbled to nothing behind them.

Hajime heaved. God. That was, without a doubt, the most ridiculously tiring thing he had ever done. And yet he survived. Again. No words could describe the utter disbelief that overcame him.

“Is… Is everyone alright?” Hajime looked up to see Papyrus checking worriedly over him and Rin.

“Yeah… I’m, uh, fine. Mostly.” He shrugged. “It’s just… I really can’t process what the hell happened back there.”

“I understand how you feel. I, too, am utterly lost. *Wait* !” Papyrus turned back to the collapsed bridge. “Did… did Tamanegi…?”

Sniffle, sniffle.

Both Hajime and Papyrus directed their attention to the source of the unexpected sobbing. It was Rin: looking at the floor and choking back tears.

“Rin! What is the matter??” Papyrus sputtered as he dashed over to her.

“I…” She tried to speak against her sharp breaths. “I… It’s my fault, isn’t it? I ran off like that without asking, a-and then Tamanegi… Tamanegi was… w-was…” She cut herself off with her own sobs, breaking down into soft wails.

“Rin…” Hajime consoled, walking over to her. “It’s not your fault. You were just eager to find people to help, I understand that. I’m sure Tamanegi wouldn’t blame you either.” He gave her a soft look.

“Hajime is right. You should be brave for Tamanegi’s sake, yes?” Papyrus smiled gently at her, placing a gloved hand on her shoulder in a comforting manner.

Rin nodded steadily. “T-That… okay. I will.”

“Speaking of which,” Hajime began quizzically, “Who… were those people? And, why were they so… weird?”

“Wait, you don’t recognise them?” Papyrus asked.

“Am I supposed to?”

Oh,” Rin spoke up, “Maybe he hasn’t seen their broadcasts.”

Hajime arched a brow. “Broadcasts? You mean like the one on the intercom?”

“Not just the intercom one. They’ve also popped up on monitors once, like T.V. screens in stores.” Rin explained. Since when did that happen? Maybe Hajime was asleep in that office a lot longer than the others.

“What was on that broadcast, exactly?” He inquired.

“From what I remember, there were more of those odd-looking animal-kids… However, their leader was a flower. Which, saying that aloud, is rather strange. Why was she the only flower?” Papyrus started to ramble.

“And…?” Hajime tried to gesture him to get back on track.

“Oh! And they were called, what was it again, desperate melody?”

“Despair Melody.” Rin corrected. “That’s what they called themselves. They also said how they were the rulers of this city.”

“Is that so?” Hajime eyed the bridge briefly. “Is that why they thought they could just destroy a *whole* bridge?” Rin didn’t respond, rubbing her arm.

“...I believe I have the feeling that they’re not really the ‘rulers’ of this city.” Papyrus confessed.

“You think?” Hajime gave him a sarcastic look. Although, now that he thought about it, that voice on the intercom must’ve been the leader, right? The way they spoke practically revealed their role.

“Um, so,” Rin faltered, “Where do we go now?”

“That…” Hajime didn’t know how to respond. But she was right: where were they supposed to go now? With their ‘ticket’ out of here now nothing but dust and debris, how else were they going to leave the city?

“Perhaps we should check the map again?” Papyrus suggested.

“I guess we should…” Hajime half-absentmindedly replied as he shoved down the creeping doubts in the back of his mind. He took out the map folded in his back pocket, and studied the whereabouts of their current location. Somehow, the map looked much bigger than it did before, all the different buildings and places becoming crowded and cluttered to the point where Hajime almost felt nauseous. That explosion aftermath really was taking its toll on him, so slowly and so painfully.

“Hajime?” Papyrus waved his hand over his unfocused eyes. “Are you looking for a--”

“Subway.” He blurted out. “The subway. We should… try the subway.”

“There’s a subway?” Rin tried to get a look at the map by rocking onto her toes.

“Yeah, just over here.” Hajime pointed to it’s icon. “It’s probably not too far, right?”

“If you believe it to be our next best option, then it’s no trouble to me!” Papyrus attested.

“Same here!” Rin chirped alongside him.

Folding the map back up and gladly tucking it away, Hajime steered them in the direction of the street they needed to take, the three leading back into the city. Nonetheless, it was obvious their pace was a lot slower than before, and eventually Hajime noticed Rin start to trail behind slightly.

“Come on, Rin! It is not safe to fall behind.” Papyrus turned to her.

“But I’m *sooo* tired…” She complained, “Can’t we take a break or something? We’ve been through so much today.”

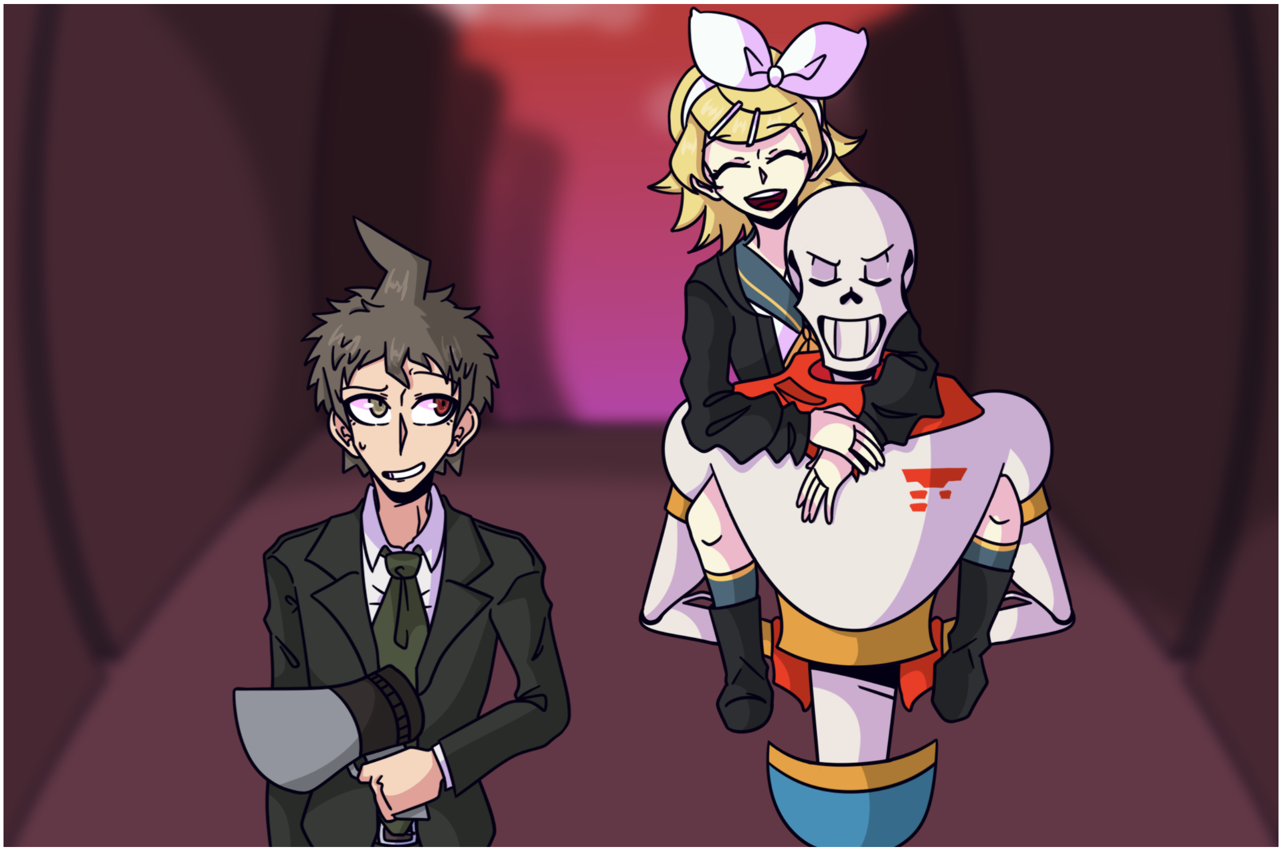
“That is true. However, there’s not really anywhere we can rest, and we have to keep our guard up in case of an attack.” Papyrus countered.

“D’awww…” Rin slumped melodramatically.

“If you’re going to act like that, I might as well just carry you.”

Rin shot up, a relieved look on her face. “Really?”

“Well, I suppose I don’t mind.” Papyrus smiled. Hajime watched as Papyrus leaned down so Rin could hop onto his back.



“Now we can continue on without fault.” He declared as they began walking again.

“He-he, thank you!”

Hajime had to hold back a chuckle: for what that was, it was oddly wholesome. The two seemed to get along well in what little time they had together so far.

“Ahh, but I’m so hungry as well,” Rin started to mumble, resting her chin upon Papyrus’ shoulder. “It’s been so long since I’ve had anything to eat.”

“We’ll have to find food later.” Hajime spoke up. “You can’t keep complaining about one thing after another, Rin.”

Rin blinked in disbelief. “What? But aren’t you hungry too, Hajime?”

“Not really…” He responded.

“But you must be! We have not eaten the entire time we’ve been together, which has been at least a day by now.” Papyrus called out. “When was the last time you ate, Hajime?”

“Well…” Hajime muttered. He didn’t really want to be cornered like this, and the answer wasn’t that important anyway.

“Puhuhu…!” The three abruptly paused as they heard a familiar robotic laughter. Just then, a gang of Monokumas leaped out from behind a corner, waving their arms manically which were stained in a faded pink. Hajime swiftly took a step back, grabbing his hacking gun from where it hung on the back of his belt. He looked towards Papyrus, nodding at each other before getting to work.

At the start, it was going well. They had just managed to blast down a fair amount of Monokumas, but unfortunately more had started to appear, likely due to them picking up the sound of the commotion nearby. And what was worse was that Papyrus couldn’t attack with his full disclosure, insistent he keep Rin on his back for safety purposes. Hajime on the other hand had just fired his last bullet at a Monokuma before the whole hacking gun froze up and refused to work.

“Goddamnit…!” He hissed. Had it run out of power or something?

“Let’s run!” Rin frantically suggested, and the three booked it. The last thing Hajime wanted to do again today was run, but they really had no choice. He’d just have to get used to such a tiring routine.

Speaking of tiring, he felt an overcoming wave of heaviness wash over him. He blinked past his sudden dizziness, focusing on fleeing the murderous herd behind them. This didn’t feel like just some fatigue he could hold back, however. It wanted to pin him down to the floor eternally, basking him in nothing but a cold sleep. And was the street warping sporadically or was it just him?

And all at once, Hajime tripped to the floor, heavy eyes focusing in and out as his mind shut off. The only thing he noticed in his blurred vision was Papyrus and Rin turning to look back at him, and a mixture of voices, some new, muffled as if underwater.

Then only darkness.

* * *

“Yippee! Yay~! Ahahaha!” Sunny Funny clapped and cheered loudly at the display of monitors before her, as if she were trying to imitate an entire crowd enticed in despair. The feed was replaying footage of the bridge’s explosion earlier in the day. “Ahh, what a lovely end to that creepy, perverted, karate-obsessed idiot! Good riddance, we won’t miss you!”

She hummed, turning her head behind her, petals swishing. “Isn’t that right? You guys think so too, right? Katy and PJ did such a good job for me, right?”

“Hmhm, yeah, they sure did,” Paula Fox agreed, stauntering towards Sunny. “Although, Sunny, I can do a much better job than what Katy did, you know. I can make it even more exciting for you, too.”

“Oh, can you? Well, that’s great and all, but we’re working together on this as a team, aren’t we?” Sunny questioned, tilting her head with wide eyes. “Oh, unless you think it’s better we split up. In that case, I want Katy to be on my side. Aw no, doesn’t that mean you can’t be on my side then?”

Paula looked aside. “I just meant that…”

“Ahaha! I’m just kidding, silly! Paula is so cute when she doesn’t understand!” Sunny giggled.

“Ah, haha,” Paula flushed. “Really, I’m working hard for you. Me and Matt both are.”

“Speaking of which,” Sunny began, looking behind them, “Matt! Did you enjoy today as well?”

At the far end of the room, Matt Major was huddled up on his knees, facing away from the two. His grip was tight on a small tablet that bled light into his darkened and keen eyes. He murmured under his breath in quick stutters and spurts, shakily smiling.

“What a shame, he won’t listen to us. I’m just so nice, inviting him here with you, and he won’t even look at me. Am I not the prettiest thing you’ve ever laid your eyes on?” Sunny fluttered her lashes in melancholy.

“Jeeze, that prick.” Paula fumed, stomping over to him. “Hey, dumbass!”

Kick . Matt fell onto his side.

“What the hell are you doing? Sunny asked you a question!”

Matt looked up at Paula, eyes dazed in ecstasy.

“P-Paula…? Ah, ah, i-it’s wonderful, it’s wonderful, ah, Future Foundation is broadcasting again. They’re going to, haha, they’re planning to find the survivors, t-the survivors, Paula--”

“God, would you shut up?! You have no respect for what Sunny does for us.” Paula scowled.

Matt slowly sat up. “Oh, but, but I w-was listening. Yes, yes, I was, I know it, I know it, I do. Haha, but, ah, maybe we shouldn’t have killed Tamanegi, no, h-he’s one of Parappa’s favourite--”

“I should just beat you senseless until you learn to love her.” Paula threatened, but Matt simply sighed in delight.

Just then, the doors flew open, and Katy Kat and PJ Berri waltzed into the room.

“We’re back!” Katy announced.

Sunny clapped her hands together. “Oh, Katy, what great timing! I was just talking about how awesome you did today!”

“Oh really? Heh, thanks. I knew that bomb would work perfectly.” She grinned. PJ stumbled over to Matt and sat down beside him, believing it was a good opportunity to lie half-asleep. Matt didn’t notice, picking back up on the broadcast on the tablet as if nothing ever happened, muttering to himself again. Paula grunted as she left the two alone in favour of Sunny.

“So then,” Katy prodded. “What should we do next?”

“Well, as much as I loved causing chaos around the city so far, I believe we’re way too far off track. Miku was never one to kill people without purpose.” Sunny turned back to the monitors. “So, I want to stop targeting random citizens!”

“Then who *should* we target? Tamanegi wasn’t exactly random. You wanted him dead.”

“I know, I know, but taking too much revenge would waste time. I’m nice like that, no?” Sunny egged on. “No, I want to focus on the people that got away from Miku’s grasp.”

“I want to find the motive video participants.”

Chapter End Notes

HELLO RIN YOU PRECIOUS BEAN WELCOME TO THE GANG!!!
Are you liking the ✨world building✨ ?? hehe

RIP Melody Despair's sanity they would've loved fnf--
I am VERY excited to work on ch3 as well... for reasons you'll find out soon...

Chapter 3: Mother Luka

Chapter Notes

> How’s everyone doin I hope we’re livin lavish (unlike these guys ouch haha)
> This chapter’s a bit lengthier than the others so far (about 1k more words) so that’s fun
> So then, enjoy !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hm…”

Peach placed a finger on her chin as she continued to study the report on her desk. Out of the corner of her eye, she glanced at her not-so-neat desk. She almost wanted to scoff at her own untidiness: was this just stress, or the fact that she’d usually have a toad to clean up after her? Nonetheless, she should really make the time to clean her office, if only by a little.

But that wasn’t important right now. No, this report was much more important. The official report of the 69th killing game had just been printed, and Peach was one of the first to be tasked with overlooking it. That job was deemed hard, as she wouldn’t turn away from the section about Mario. Most of the images of him were slightly blurred, the branch doing their best to find the clearest pictures from the broadcast feed, but Peach was content regardless. Just seeing his face again brought her a sense of safety.

“Peach.” Peach was snapped out of her staring as she heard her office door be opened, and a voice call out to her. She turned to see Munakata stepping briskly inside, closing the door behind him and walking over to her. Without a further word, he placed down a sheet of paper over the report, forcing her whole attention over it. As Peach studied it, her eyes lit up in relief.

It was headshots of the survivors, and they looked recent.

“Oh, is this…?” She asked, hopeful.

Munakata nodded. “They have been taken in by the foundation.”

“Well that’s… that’s wonderful!” She praised, not being able to hold back a giddy smile. She couldn’t help but look over a certain green plumber, whose expression appeared to be quite determined despite his darkened eyes. “May I ask what will happen to them now?”

“After they’ve been cleaned up, tested, and gone through further questioning, the five will be given the choice to either join the foundation’s intel, or to join our rescue team.” Munakata explained to her. “Our pre-existing member, Nagito Komaeda, will assume his role in branch 15, requesting that the others join him. However, Ayano Aishi had decided to join the rescue team, intent that she will work alone.”

Peach looked at the sheet again. “That can’t possibly be safe, can it?”

“It is a dangerous move, but she wishes her talents to be used in this way.”

“Then…” Peach thought for a while, jumping up once an idea came to her, “What if we let her go with a partner? I know someone who’s been desperate to go outside for a while.”

“And will this ‘someone’ be sufficient enough to accompany her?” Munakata inquired.

Peach smiled. “I believe so. After all, she’s always had a knack for sport.”

* * *

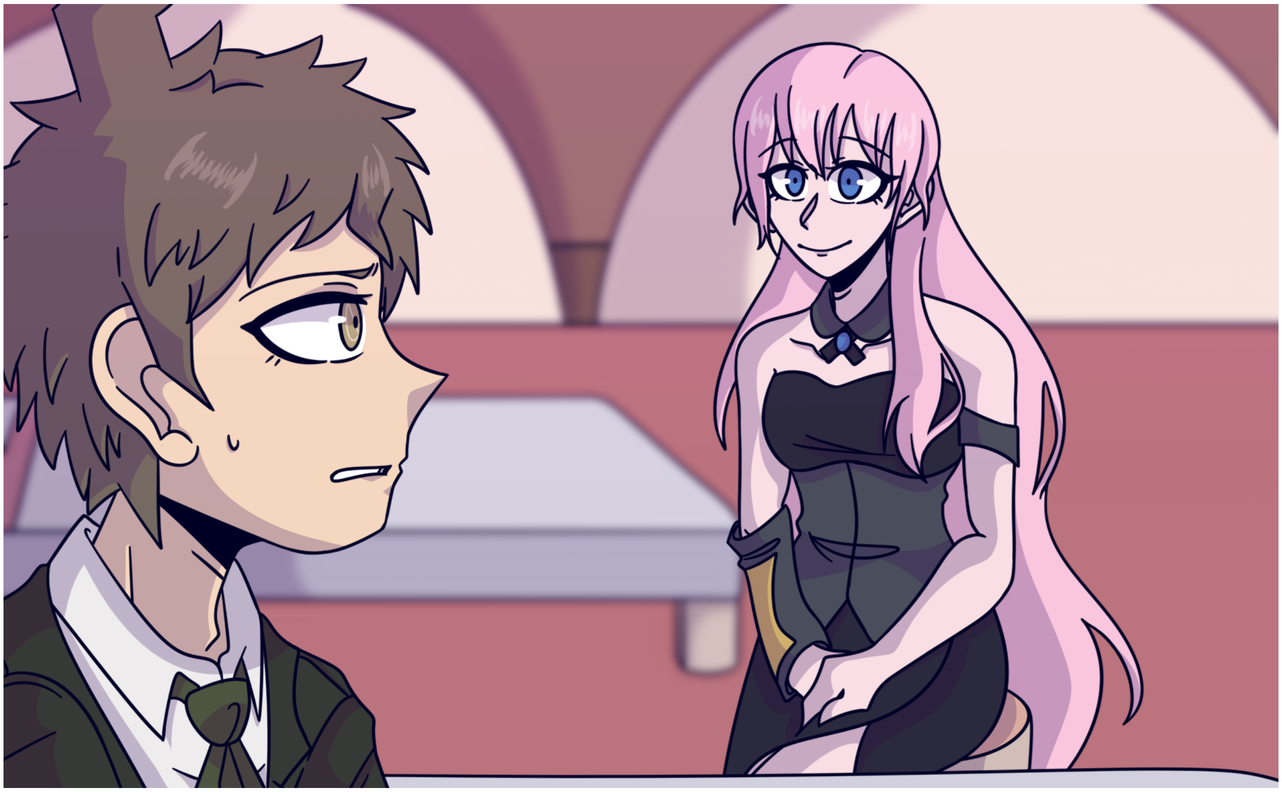
When Hajime’s consciousness came back to him he steadily realised a soft glow against his face. Gaining back the nerves in the rest of his body, he attempted to decipher the gentle material he was resting upon. It felt like déjà vu: even his head was certainly on something much more comfortable than concrete.

Wait, concrete? Where *was* the concrete?

Opening his eyes, Hajime understood he was not looking directly above at the red-purple sky, but instead the high ceiling of an old-fashioned infirmary.

“Gh… What…?” He croaked, raising a slightly limp hand to his forehead. The more Hajime looked, the more the ceiling actually appeared to be the inside of the roof; arched and polished and chestnut. Just what kind of building was he in?

“Ah, you’ve woken up.” A completely new voice almost startled Hajime as he sat up, feeling a thin blanket slide off his torso. He turned his head to see a young woman next to him, probably around the same age as he was, with noticeably long pink hair that flowed down to the floor where she sat on a chair beside his infirmary bed. Hajime wondered how long it was when she was standing. “...Are you alright? You’ve been sleeping for quite a while now.”



“Ah, u-um,” Hajime fumbled for words, trying to piece together any type of coherency. This wasn’t the time to be worrying about useless details about hair: who even was this woman? Where was he? And wait, where were Papyrus and Rin? “...I’m fine. Where am I exactly?”

The woman noticed Hajime looking around worriedly. “Oh, please don’t be afraid. You’re not in any danger. Your friends are here too.”

“My… My friends?” Hajime whipped back to her. That meant Papyrus and Rin, right?

The woman didn’t respond immediately, instead smiling gently at him as if to ease his state. “I’m Luka Megurine. And you’re Hajime, right?”

Hajime faltered, raising a brow slightly.. “...Yeah. So, where are…?”

“Oh, Hajime!!” Hajime recognised that voice as it boomed into the open room. He didn’t have time to respond as a pair of arms wrapped him into a strong hug, sending him back a little. It didn’t take a genius to realise this was Papyrus. “I’m so glad you are okay! I was awfully worried when you fell asleep like that! You should know better than to take naps in the middle of a chase!!” Papyrus gushed in relief as Hajime attempted to breathe through the strong hold.

“Papyrus, I think Hajime would appreciate you not being too rough. He just woke up, after all.” Luka intervened, keeping her warm smile.

“Oh!” Papyrus promptly let go of Hajime. “Apologies, Hajime!”

“It’s, uh, fine…” Hajime muttered. But, he had to admit he was beyond relieved himself to see Papyrus. That must mean wherever he was was safe, right? No, just to trust the sight of Papyrus would be too ignorant. He needed to question this more. “So just… how did we get here exactly?”

“I can’t imagine how confused you must be right now. From what I heard, you really took quite the fall,” Luka began, “But, a few of my people were on a scavenging expedition when they bumped into you and your friends and took you all back here.” Her people? Did that mean there were others here?

“And what’s ‘back here’? Where are we?” Hajime questioned further, slipping out from underneath the sheets and sitting on the edge of the bed.

Luka stood up with poise, holding a hand up to gesture around. “This, here, is a sanctuary for those victimised by the motive videos for Miku’s killing game.”

“What, really?” Hajime was astonished. Just how did they keep bumping into motive video survivors so easily? “Does this mean you’re one as well?”

“Yes…” Luka's calm face turned to one of deep reflective pain. “I was one of the friends involved in Miku’s motive video. Ever since she revealed her true colours, I fought to oppose her madness and save everyone she used so horribly.” Hajime had to admit despite how forlorn she was, it seemed Luka also felt a grave betrayal towards Miku.

“Wait, hold on,” Hajime realised, “If you were also part of Miku’s motive video, then does that mean you know—“

“Luka!” A sweet voice rang into the room as Hajime looked to see another familiar face walk in: Rin. She skipped towards Luka and rested her head against her shoulder, in which Luka promptly wrapped her arm around her. “Ah, Hajime! You’re awake too!” Rin noticed Hajime looking at them.

“Hey, Rin… You know Luka, huh?”

“Duh! She’s my friend! I’ve missed you so much, Luka!” Rin happily chirped.

“So have I, Rin.” Luka chuckled. “I was very surprised to see you of all people show up, ever since we were all separated.”

Rin hummed in agreement. “But I’m so happy!”

Now that Hajime thought about it, Luka did look a little similar to Rin: the near perfect idol hair and strange cuffs around her wrists should’ve done it for him. Perhaps being in a near comatose state mere minutes ago numbed his sense of focus.

“Isn’t this so wonderful, Hajime?” Papyrus spoke up next to him. “Rin has been reunited with one of her friends!”

“Yeah, I guess that is nice.” Hajime replied, standing up.

“Oh, but, now that you are awake, I want to ask Luka if she knows what happened to you.”

“From what I can gather, it was simply malnutrition that caused him to pass out.” Luka explained. Oh, *how nice* . Hajime didn’t even think about how food would affect his energy that much, even if he was constantly running the entire day.

“Hajime!” Papyrus pointed a finger directly into Hajime’s face. “Why did you not tell me you were hungry??”

“What?! That doesn’t have to do with the— It doesn’t matter anymore, okay?” Hajime shot back.

“Speaking of hungry, when are we eating again?” Rin looked up at Luka.

“Soon. Ah, in fact, I should probably start to prepare dinner.” Luka noted. She then turned to Hajime. “I can take you out to the main hall to meet the others, if you’d like.”

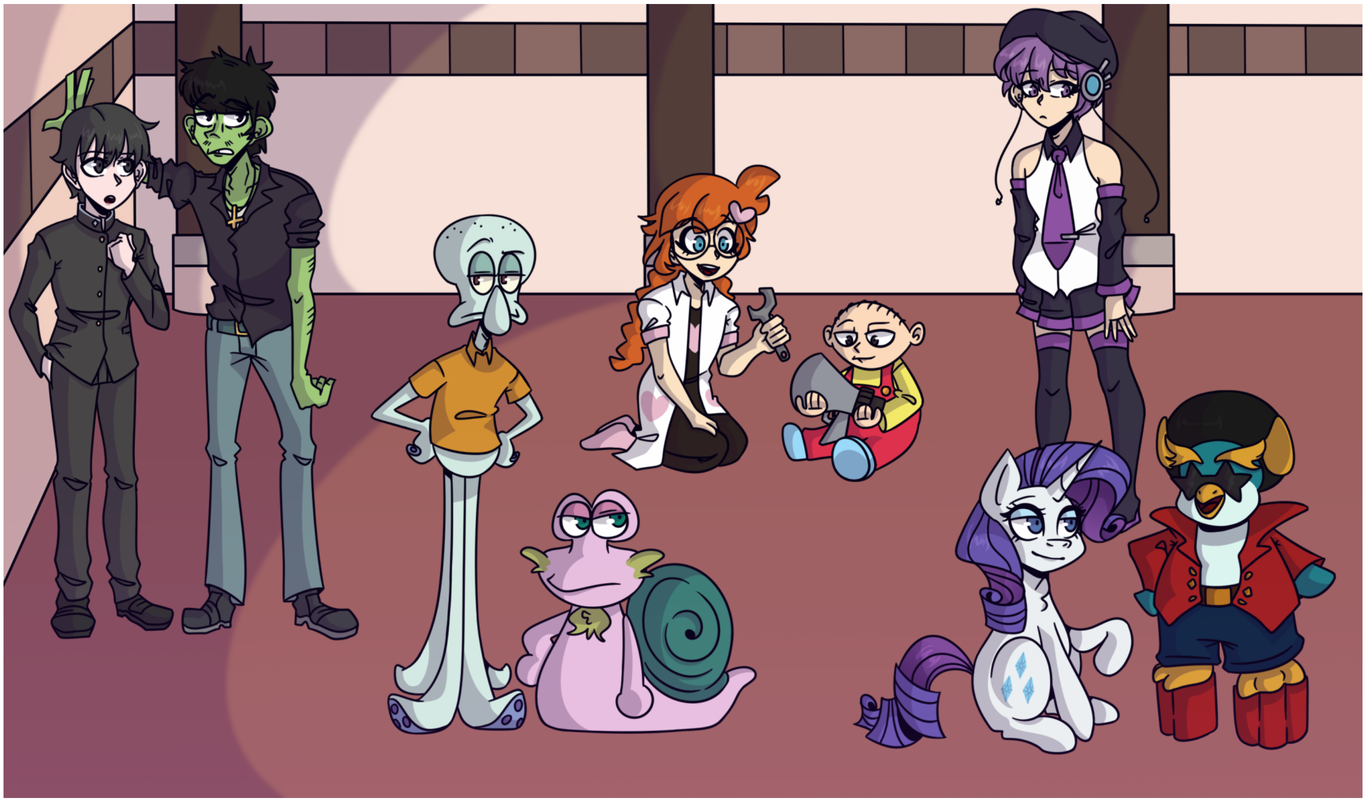
“I guess it’ll be good to stretch my legs a bit.” Hajime shrugged. Then again, he also wanted to see just how many motive video victims were here, and how possibly absurd they could get.

Luka guided the three out of the room and towards double doors that lead to a large open space. There were rows of benches just a few feet away that lead up to a stage-like platform with a podium. And behind that, Hajime noticed, were stained glass windows and a large crucifix and a carving of a religious figure and…

They were in a church.

They were in a *church* ?

Infact, Hajime was so baffled to find out they were in a church of all places, that when he finally noticed the array of creatures around the room, his sheer shock couldn't reach any higher. He would've stayed frozen if it weren't for Luka speaking up in front of him.



"There were ten of us in total before you joined us. I found each and every one of them on the streets of this city, and took them back here. Despite their struggles and differences, they've all managed to work together with hope." Luka professed, looking around at everyone with a proud gleam in her eye. Hajime hoped the people were as nice as she was describing them. "You should introduce yourself to them while I prepare dinner, Hajime."

"Oh?" Hajime looked towards Papyrus and Rin. "Is that alright with you guys?"

"Sure it is! We've already spoken to them, actually." Rin smiled.

“Luka,” A new voice, somewhat robotically strained, called out toward the group. Hajime glanced around to see a small girl with purple hair and an outfit similar to Rin’s walking up to them. “Have you started to prepare dinner yet?”

“Ah, what great timing, I was just about to leave for the kitchen.” Luka beamed at her. “Oh, Hajime, this is Defoko.” She then introduced. Defoko turned to Hajime, a blank look glazing her eyes. Hajime swore he saw a scowl, but with a face that soft it seemed unlikely.

“Nice to meet you.” She simply spoke.

“Defoko here is a victim of Teto’s video. She doesn’t like to talk too much about it, so I would advise we leave it at that.” Luka added. Defoko twisted her head to the floor, her beanie slipping down her head slightly. Hajime wondered if it was to do with Teto’s fate that made Defoko so conscious.

“Anyway, we should go get started on dinner now. We’ll see you later.” Luka and Defoko left the main hall. Opening his mouth to say something to Papyrus and Rin, Hajime realised they had left too: to one of the benches to giggle about something. Hajime brushed it off as he looked around the room for someone to talk to. Just then, he noticed a metallic glint shine off of something, and realised it belonged to his hacking gun. It was being handled by two young people: a girl with red hair bunched in braids, and a… toddler?

Curious, Hajime wandered over to them. As he got closer, he heard the two’s conversation come into clear about the quality of his weapon. He raised a brow.

“Hey,” He interjected, causing the two to notice him, “What’re you doing with my gun?”

“Oh, there he is!” The girl pointed out. “Hello, mister! We were just making a few adjustments to your megaphone.”

“An upgrade, to be exact. We noticed it was out of ammunition. It’s an awfully unique weapon to be frank, quite versatile for disguising itself as an everyday object. You could probably smuggle something like this to an assasination.” Hajime blinked. Did the toddler just *talk* ? “...Excuse me? I was talking about your weapon here.”

“Uh, Stewie, I think he’s just… overwhelmed. Like the others were the first time.” The girl sheepishly pointed out to him.

“Ah. No intellectual children in your universe either, I take it?” The toddler asked Hajime.

“Not any that can talk, I guess.” Hajime replied, still taken aback. Although, he did have to admit his hacking gun wasn’t in the best shape right now.

“Hehe, that’s okay!” The girl assured. “Oh! How could I forget? I’m Penny, and this is Stewie.”

“I’m Hajime. Are you guys familiar with technology then?” Hajime asked, unsure if the adjustments they were making to his weapon were safe.

“I’m a scientist in training under the guide of my uncle Crygor. I’m interested in inventions too, though.” Penny picked up a screwdriver as she started toying with the hacking gun’s open control panel.

“And I simply live in a dim-witted middle class family that so happens to assume my closest is full of rattle toys rather than shrink rays and time machine pads.” Stewie jeered.

“Uh-huh… Wait a minute.” Hajime paused. “I recognise you… Wasn’t your motive video shown in the killing game?”

Stewie started to fiddle with a detached circuit board. “So you watched the broadcast too, huh? I wasn’t a fan of my personal message to Brian being exposed to the entire multiverse like that. People can form ideas.”

Hajime furrowed his brows at Stewie’s strange comment, then looked aside. “Oh, I’m sorry about Brian…”

Stewie sighed. “I don’t know why you’re apologising. I knew the dog was going to have his day. If not in there, it would’ve been close anyway. To be honest, out here isn’t exactly any better, either.” Hajime nodded in understanding, leaving it at that.

“How about you, Penny? Who’s motive video were you in?” He turned to Penny.

“Um, it was… Ashley’s.” Penny admitted after a moment.

“Oh… I’m sorry, I didn’t realise that--”

“But it’s okay!” Penny declared. “Ashley’s not truly dead!”

“She’s… not?” Hajime questioned.

“Well, okay, she may be right now. But, me and Stewie are currently working on a machine that,” Penny beckoned Hajime to lean closer, which he did so, as she whispered in his ear, “it will bring people back from the dead.”

Hajime’s eyes widened, skeptical. “Really? You two think you could do that?”

“It’s just a work in progress. We’re still trying to figure out most of the calculations between the two of us. It would be better if this stays between us three for now.” Stewie mentioned, giving Penny a stern look.

“Oops, sorry, haha…” Penny apologised. “I just think Hajime looks like the type not to tell anyone, anyway.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t. Uh, good luck on that, though.” Hajime affirmed. “I should go meet the others now.”

“We’ll take good care of your gun!” Penny waved as Hajime walked off. He admired the two’s perseverance and confidence in their talents, however wondered if anyone could pull off an invention like that, let alone by two gifted children. He shrugged it off for now as he saw he was approaching two more creatures: this time a white unicorn and a penguin in a noticeably flashy outfit.

“Darling, you must tell me more about this jeweler's place. I’m always intrigued by exotic items.” He heard the unicorn insist.

“I haven’t been there too much, darling, but I can insist that the owner is such a dear, and quite well-suited herself.” The penguin replied.

“Um, hello?” Hajime cut in.

“Oh, you’re the other new member, aren’t you dear?” The unicorn noticed. “We saw you get carried inside.”

“Did you now…” Hajime faltered, realising that everyone else must’ve watched his unconscious body get carried past to the church’s infirmary.

“Don’t worry, darling, we didn’t judge. I’m DJ Grooves, a movie director. Well, the directing has been put on hold for now, for obvious reasons.” The penguin assured, introducing himself.

“As with my fashionista career. Rarity, if you will.” The unicorn followed.

“I’m Hajime… So, who’s motive videos were you made to film?”

"For me, dear, it was my good friend Fluttershy. Of course, it wasn't just me: our entire friend group was involved." Rarity remarked. She then brushed her mane aside as she hesitated. "I'm not too sure where the rest of them are right now, but I hope they didn't take the news about Fluttershy too harshly…"

"I'm sure they'll be strong about it." Hajime offered.

"I, on the other hand, was made to talk about my director rival, The Conductor. I mean, *I* like him, but I never would've thought he considered me the closest person to him. I have to admit how flattered I am to know that." Grooves summarized, putting a flipper on his chest.

"Hey, didn't The Conductor escape the killing game?" Hajime brought up.

Grooves smiled. "He… he definitely did, didn't he? It would be selfish of me to say I'm glad, but I would really like to see him again soon. Being rescued by Luka gave me such a ray of hope about all this -- I thank her so much for that."

"So true, darling. She really is quite selfless." Rarity agreed.

Hajime nodded. "That's good to hear. I'll see you around, I guess." He waved to them as he left them to continue their conversation about fashion. Also, was it just him or did they both favour in saying 'darling' a lot?

Before he could focus back onto the room, Hajime bumped into another figure. He subconsciously apologised under his breath as he looked up at them. And then paused. Was he looking at a squid? No, an octopus?

"Look where you're going next time." The octopus scolded, folding his arms over his chest. Now that Hajime took a better look at them, he noticed this creature wasn't wearing any pants. He immediately snapped his attention away from that fact. Not pleasant at all.

"Y-Yeah… So, who are you?" He asked.

“I’m Squidward. And do you often come to places conked out like a rock?” Squidward ridiculed.

“No, I just… That really doesn’t matter, okay?” Hajime retaliated with a hint of frustration. “I’m Hajime. Can I ask who’s motive video you were made to film?”

Squidward calmed down a little. “Krabs, my boss. I have no idea why *I* was dragged into his video, especially with the little yellow idiot.”

“Mr. Krabs?” Hajimed asked. “I’m sorry that he was the first to die.”

“Not that it’s a big deal to me: he was a cheapskate con-artist at best. And a shoddy crab at worst.” Squidward denounced. “Though I have to admit I won’t have a job once this all blows over. I wonder if the Chum Bucket has flexible hours…”

“Ugh, is that really all you have to say about yer friend?! Yer such a heartless sea urchin!” A new voice, one with a defiant accent, bellowed below Hajime. He glanced down to see a small purple snail slither up towards the two with his fists balled.

“It’s *octopus* , sea snail.” Squidward seethed.

“And who are you?” Hajime cut in.

“Escargoon, at yer service. Well, I’m truly at the service to the king of Dreamland, King Dedede, but…” Escargoon’s fists curled tighter. “Argh! Why does this cruel world always take away the greatest people?!”

“You were Dedede’s motive video victim, I’m guessing then?” Hajime assumed.

"I sure as heck am! If only his loyal goon was there to protect him, then none of this flabbering-jabbering nonsense would've never happened in the first place!" Escargoon ranted on.

"Oh would you just speak english please?" Squidward interjected. "You're so melodramatic."

"Says the one who only paints pictures of himself!" Escargoon pointed a finger at him.

"Excuse me? It's not like I have anything else to do here other than keep on top of my talents!" Squidward refuted.

Hajime slowly started to back away from the situation between the two as it got more and more heated. "I'm just… gonna go now." He quietly excused himself, but the others didn't seem to notice. He sighed: they were quite the eccentric bunch, that was for sure.

"Hey, are you really expecting me to clean it?"

Hajime perked up as he heard yet another new voice speak up. He turned around to see a schoolboy with a generic-looking haircut bickering against a taller man with pale-green skin leaning against the wall.

"I really don't get what the bloody fuss s'all about, mate. S'just a bat." Hajime heard the man argue lethargically.

" *Your* bat. I just don't think it's fair how I have to clean up after you." The schoolboy huffed.

"Uh, hello?" Hajime decided to finally walk up to them. "Is everything okay over here?"

"Oh, look who finally decided to wake up from his nap." The man jested. "Heheh, how yer feelin' sleeping beauty?"

“ *What* ?” Hajime raised a harsh brow.

“Please just ignore him. He’s always like this.” The schoolboy apologised.

“And he’s always actin’ like a twink.” The man quipped as the schoolboy turned to him with an offended look. “Anyways, I’m Murdoc. Got nothin’ else to say, really.”

“Well, what about your motive video? Who were you made to talk about?” Hajime retorted.

Murdoc put his hands behind his head. “Eh, that? My band member, 2D. I gave him that name, you know. Heheh.”

“2D, huh? With what Miku did to him, I’m sure you must be upset.” Hajime reminisced.

“What? I thought it was that red chick.” Murdoc wasn’t even looking at Hajime anymore. Hajime held back a frustrated groan.

“Um,” The schoolboy decided to break the silence, “I’m Taro. If you were wondering, I was made to talk about this girl named Ayano in my video. I have no relation to her, though, apart from the fact that she’s a year under me at my school, so I don’t understand why I was chosen.” He explained. Hajime was sure that Taro must be Ayano’s ‘senpai’, the person she kept referring to throughout the killing game. He didn’t decide to bring it up, however, as the whole concept of a ‘senpai’ being real felt absolutely ridiculous.

“Well, I don’t know if you know this already, but Ayano was one of the people who escaped the killing game.” Hajime admitted.

“Oh, really? Maybe I could meet her soon and ask her if she knows why I was used in her motive video…” Taro replied.

“Heheh.” Murdoc chuckled.

“What?” Taro turned to him.

“I just find it funny how you don’t even know the person you had to talk about back then. What the hell did you even say?”

“That--That doesn’t matter! And, didn’t I tell you to go clean your bat?” Taro stuttered back.

“What, really? This again?” Murdoc pushed himself off the wall to stand at his full height. “I don’t need some bloody kid telling me what to do.”

“Well I’m only telling you because you’re not taking any responsibility!”

“Responsibility my arse.”

Now this was just getting weird. Hajime had no shame this time in walking right away from the erupting conflict. Despite Murdoc showing himself off to be the type of person Hajime would definitely avoid, he had to admit even Taro seemed blander than himself. Weird.

Hajime sighed. Were these really the people that were forced to film a video for their friends just like him? At least his old classmates were humans, despite their own abnormalness. He honestly had to give kudos to Luka for willingly taking some of them in.

“Everyone,” Speak of the devil, or well, saint in this case: Luka called out into the main hall, “Dinner is ready. Please follow me to the dining area.” People started to slowly shuffle out of the room, and Hajime trailed along behind. He had no idea about where any room was here, so it was best to just let the crowd guide him. However, what interested him more was dinner: he really hadn’t eaten in so long, hadn’t he? It was something of a miracle that he was still striving right now without his mouth watering.

Once he arrived amongst the others, Hajime looked upon a large wooden dining table in the middle of an ornamented room; it was mostly just religious trinkets however. A few candles were lit by the sides which gave the room a mind orange glow.

Hajime saw Rin and Papyrus sat close to the end of the head of the table — where Luka sat — and as they noticed him, waved to him to sit with them. He did so, sitting between Rin and Penny.

“Soo,” Rin began, quieting her voice slightly, “What did you think of everyone?”

“Well, they were… something, alright.” Hajime commented.

Rin giggled. “I think they’re pretty unique, though.”

“But, this is exactly what we wanted, right Hajime?” Papyrus announced. “We can take all the survivors with us! How incredible!”

“What was that?” Luka looked towards them with a creased brow. “Where are you going?”

“Oh, no! You see, me and Hajime were trying to find and rescue motive video survivors!” Papyrus re-explained, oblivious to her concerned face.

“They’re not going anywhere, these people. It’s just too dangerous.” Luka objected.

“Wait, what?” Hajime asked. “It’s not *that* severe. And, well, we’ll probably find a way to contact Future Foundation faster with more of us.” The last part he added on as he admitted to himself it was true: if he ever wanted to contact them at this rate, he’d need more heads than three.

“What’s Future Foundation?” Hajime heard Penny speak up next to him.

“An organisation I work for. I won’t get into all the details, but they do specialise in this kind of rescue.” He explained.

“That’s the first time I’ve heard something like that existing.” Stewie commented. As Hajime looked around, he noticed that the entire table’s attention was now on him. “And where is this Future Foundation?”

“Well you see, it’s, um…” Hajime trailed off. What could he say? He really didn’t know.

“What a lost cause…” Squidward rolled his eyes. Hajime awkwardly looked toward the table top: this wasn’t pleasant, everyone watched as he basically declared something impossible sounding. He didn’t know if it was worse than them all watching his immobile body supposedly be carried past them.

“I don’t think it is!” Rin countered. “We should trust Hajime. Future Foundation *will* help us! Don’t you think so, Luka?”

Luka took a while to reply, avoiding eye contact with Rin. “I suppose I could think about it.”

“Oh ho! You see, everything worked out in the end!” Papyrus happily beamed.

“Barely…” Hajime muttered inaudibly.

Later, once dinner had finished, the group had split off to do their own things. As it was getting dark from what Hajime could make out from the dusky windows, Luka asked the three to follow her to a room she prepared for them. She led them down a long, narrow hall, with presumably rooms belonging to the other members of the group. The trio’s room was at the end of the hall, the size being moderately smaller than the infirmary, Hajime thought. However, it was big enough for two beds to fit inside.

Hang on, only two?

“Oh, I’m sorry that there’s only two beds.” Luka began, noticing Hajime’s dismayed face. “As you three arrived on such short notice, I had to make-do with what we already had.”

“That’s okay, Luka! Rin can have her own bed, and Hajime and I can simply share the other one!” Papyrus insisted with a grin.

Hajime turned to him wildly. “Wait what, why would we--”

“Oh, really? That’s so relieving to hear!” Luka placed a hand on her chest. Hajime stood there, baffled: was he really going to be sharing a bed with Papyrus? It’s not that he despised the idea or anything, but it was becoming increasingly hard to sleep, and sleeping next to another person mere centimetres away would have the potential to make it harder.

“Nice, I get a bed to myself!” Rin smugly stated. Then, she abruptly yawned. “Ah, s’good timing too.”

Luka chuckled under her breath. “You have a good rest, Rin. God knows you need it. As for you two as well: please have a good sleep.” She politely bowed as she stepped out of the room. The three waved to her -- Rin the most energetic despite her tiredness -- as she left.

Rin skipped over to her bed and sat herself on the edge. “Man, aren’t we lucky to find this place? Or, well, have this place find us?”

“I believe you’re right, Rin.” Papyrus agreed, walking over to her. “I really should ask Luka if I can cook for everyone tomorrow.”

“You know how to cook?” Hajime questioned, folding his arms over his chest.

“Of course! The Great Papyrus is a world class chef! I am a master of all things spaghetti!” Papyrus conceitedly intoned. “Just ask my brother -- he’d say the same thing.”

“Don’t ask mine. Once I gave Len burnt toast and he chased me around the house all morning.” Rin snickered.

Hajime watched as the two started to converse about anecdotes on each other’s brothers, idly smiling, until he heard a knock at the door. He turned and walked over to open it up.

“Down here.” Hajime looked down to see Penny and Stewie holding his hacking gun.

“We finished upgrading your weapon!” Penny handed the gun over to Hajime. “We decided to give it back now so you wouldn’t think we were gonna steal it or something.”

“It’s not like we’d have any use for it inside here, anyway.” Stewie added. “Although, I must admit you’ll be pleasantly surprised with the improvements we made to it.”

“Oh, thanks. You guys really didn’t have to, to be honest.” Hajime modestly thanked.

Stewie shook his head. “Please, we thank you. Finding things to tinker with here has been basically impossible.”

“We’re always kinda craving to take things apart, even if we are making calculations for the ‘you-know-what’ most of the time.” Penny admitted. That mindset reminded Hajime a little of Kazuichi, and he couldn’t help but smirk over the thought.

Hajime waved to the two as they excused themselves back to their own room. He closed the door and wandered back into the room, where Rin and Papyrus had started to turn in for the night. He sighed: at least he could attempt to get some sleep in a hopefully safe place.

Right?

Well that was useless, to say the least.

Hajime woke up (if you could even call his eyelids being lightly shut a form of sleep) absolutely exhausted. Despite his concerning lack of sleep, his eyes still felt incredibly heavy, and his limbs possibly even heavier. Would he even be able to heave himself out of bed at this rate?

And it was all because of Papyrus.

Who knew skeletons could sleep-talk? Hell, who knew *anyone* could continuously rant and gush about royal guards and spaghetti all night long unconsciously? Hajime sure didn't, and he wished it had stayed that way. Only inches between the two in the bed and he could hear everything perfectly. It made his ears strain to the point that he honestly thought he was going to go insane. He tried covering his ears with his hands, the blanket, he even tried wrapping his blazer around his head (which he immediately gave up on as it basically blocked his access to oxygen, but goddamn was that the closest thing to serenity in that situation).

"Ah, good morning, Hajime!" Papyrus sprung up beside him. Hajime all but groaned. "I had such a wonderful rest, much better than those hospital beds from last time."

'That makes one of us', Hajime complained in his head.

"Well then," Papyrus jumped out of the bed and stretched his bones. "Time to seize the day with incredulous determination!"

Hajime genuinely wanted to slap him, if not for his fatigued body.

"Ah, good morning…" He heard Rin groggily greet as she sat up in her bed. She smoothed down some strands of hair that were sticking up, adjusted her bow, and hopped out of bed. "How is everyone?"

“Great!” Papyrus replied.

Hajime finally forced himself to roll out of bed, stumbling onto his feet. “Fine, I guess.”

“Oh!” Rin perked up. “Do you guys smell that? Hm… Ah! I think it’s crepes! C’mon! We can’t miss breakfast!” She started to bounce on her toes, ready to dash out the door at any moment.

“We’re not holding you back. You can leave if you want.” Hajime informed, rubbing his temples. Without further notice, Rin said a quick goodbye as she quickly left the room. Papyrus laughed, placing his hands on his hips.

“What energy she has, huh Hajime?” He mused. “...Hajime?”

Hajime snapped his eyes open. “H-Huh?”

“Oh dear! Are you falling asleep again because you’re hungry, Hajime? Quick: we must go get breakfast too!” Papyrus exclaimed as he grabbed Hajime’s arm and rushed out the room.

After an oddly satisfying crepe breakfast, Hajime, Papyrus and Rin strolled out into the main hall, where a few members of the group were already situated. Hajime noticed Murdoc and Taro near the front doors, cleaning some bats.

“Hey, what’re you guys doing?” He asked, making his way towards them.

“We’re just gettin’ ready to go out.” Murdoc responded.

“Actually, we’re going scavenging. We do it everyday to gather food and supplies. It’s me and Murdoc on the roster this week, so we’re going outside again.” Taro clarified.

“Again?” Hajime inquired.

Murdoc rested his bat over his shoulder. “Heh, how could we forget you were out cold? We were the ones who found you lot in that robot ambush.”

“Huh.” Hajime deadpanned. “Actually, do you mind if I join you?” He thought it would be nice to the group as a ‘thank you’ if he tagged along with their work, but Hajime had to admit he also wanted to test out his upgraded hacking gun too.

“Sure, if you want.” Taro shrugged and smiled slightly.

“That sounds like a good idea, Hajime! I’ll join you as well!” Papyrus bellowed out next to him.

“Oh, me too!” Rin raised her hand high in the air.

“Rin,” A familiar warm voice picked up behind them, “It’s too dangerous for you to go out there. I just found you, and there’s no way I’m risking your safety like this.”

“But L *uuu* ka…” Rin whined sorrowfully. “Hajime and Papyrus are going too. They’ll look out for me, right?”

“Well…” Luka pondered.

“Luka, don’t worry. I’m going too.” Defoko briskly joined the commotion.

“Defoko? Hm, okay. I suppose if a big group is going, then you should be protected.” Luka weighed in with a defeated smile.

As the six left the front entrance of the church, Hajime peered behind him at the exterior foundation. He had to admit it was pleasing to the eye, especially as it hadn't really experienced much destruction to it.

"So, where the hell are we going again?" Murdoc asked, stretching his back.

"Huh? I thought you knew this time!" Taro complained.

"Hey, it's alright. I have a map we can look at." Hajime firmly interjected as he reached into his pocket to check if he was still right. Fortunately, he was, taking the map out and unfolding it in front of him. "Where exactly is this place, then?"

Defoko approached him and pointed at the map without hesitation. "We're here." As it turned out, they weren't too far away from where they originally were at the bridge; just a good way east at best.

"Hey, how about we go to the subway you were talking about, Hajime?" Rin suggested.

"The subway?" Hajime paused for a few beats. Why did he want to go to the subway yesterday, again? Wasn't it a potential escape route? "Actually, yeah. We should continue over there."

After pointing out the direction they should take, Hajime shoved the map away as the group headed off to the subway. The trip was quiet, almost uncomfortably so, despite steering clear from Monokumas. Rin tried to spark up a conversation with Defoko, trying to prompt her over mentions of Teto, but Defoko didn't budge. Rin sulked away, and the trek was in silence once more.

What either felt likes mere minutes of prolonged hours, the six arrived at the subway entrance. The concrete stairs that led down under the city gave Hajime an enlightened sense of aspiration, however upon further inspection, he realised the entrance was blocked off by a rigid and thick metal gate.

“Oh bugger, s’locked.” Murdoc pointed out the obvious.

“What shall we do now?” Papyrus raised the question on everyone’s mind.

“We should look for a key, shouldn’t we?” Rin proposed. “There’s gotta be one around here somewhere.” It was wishful thinking, but the group had no other choice: they decided to split up to search for a potential key. Hajime considered investigating the subway station nearby, as that would be the most logical place for a key to be. As he stepped inside, he scanned around the front office. It was void of all noise, par from any muffled conversation going on outside, and he could sense a dreadful aura hovering around. If he were in any other situation, Hajime would’ve definitely left and never looked back.

Travelling further into the office, Hajime froze as he witnessed a less than humane sight: there, barely feet away from where he stood, was a man slumped in a desk chair. The body was unmoving, not even a tremble or a twitch, and it was stained in pink, dripping onto the carpet around it, creating a hot pink puddle-like stain. The head was hanging down in such a way that there was no angle where Hajime could see their face, and yet he knew exactly what expression it bore.

Just then, an array of images flooded through Hajime’s mind as if his life was flashing before his eyes.

The murders of the Jabberwock Island killing game. The virtual murders of his friends.

“Ngh…!” Hajime trembled backwards involuntarily, overwhelmed by the grotesque scenes replaying in his unforgiving brain. He realised his breathing was shallow and desperate. His knees felt like they were going to buckle at any moment. Oh god. Oh god why was this happening?

“Oi,” A voice startled Hajime, causing him to visibly jolt, “did you find anything in ‘ere?” He whipped his pale head around to see Murdoc and Taro at the doorway. Twisting his head back in hopes they didn’t notice his mild breakout, Hajime clenched his sweaty fists.

“U-Um,” His voice cracked, “Well, I don’t--”

“Oh, hey!” Murdoc exclaimed, striding right over to the body in the chair. “I think I’ve spotted myself somethin’ shiny.” The way he fiddled around with the lifeless corpse almost made Hajime gag. Murdoc finally snagged something off the belt of the body, and held it up in pride of himself.

“Did you really have to do that to a… dead guy?” Taro meekly asked, avoiding direct eye contact with the corpse.

“What? I got our bloody key. Now, c’mon, you both look like right ol’ softies, heheh.” Murdoc chuckled as he exited the office past the two.

“Hey, are you alright?” Taro caught sight of Hajime’s unpleasant expression.

“Uh, yeah, I’m good.” He mumbled in reply. “Let’s just head back.”

Arriving back at the subway entrance, Hajime watched as Murdoc held up the key smugly, only to be snatched by Defoko who curtly walked down the entrance’s steps with slight distaste in her eyes. He had to admit he respected her patience with him, or lack thereof. The five followed her down as Defoko unlocked the gate and proceeded into the subway. The first thing Hajime felt was a sharp coldness, followed by a moist repugnant aroma: he could safely say that he was not a fan of abandoned subways. Echoed clacks of the group’s footsteps bounced around the narrow walls, making it trivial to even try and focus on his thoughts.

After a few minutes or so of walking, they came out into a crossroad with three paths leading to different directions in front of them.

“Where should we go?” Rin looked towards Hajime.

“I’m not sure. How about we check that kiosk over th--”

"Extreme!!" A piercing screech made them all pause. All at once, a flood of Monokumas exploded out of one of the pathways: ten, no fifteen, maybe even twenty.

"W-What the? Why're *they* here?" Taro sputtered.

"Does it look like I know?! We're the ones with bats for god sake, let's get at 'em!" Murdoc shouted back.

"Rin, you stay back! You must not get yourself caught up in this." Papyrus warned Rin, who nodded and promptly ran back. And so, the five started to attack the robots. Hajime didn't have much leeway to observe how the others were doing, too caught up in shooting down eye after eye. As for his first attempt with his upgraded hacking gun, he really couldn't tell the difference at first. Although, the Monokumas did look to be flying back with a bit more power than usual -- it felt satisfying.

Hajime briskly turned to check if there were any robots behind him, and his eyes widened as he saw a lone Monokuma squirming under a kiosk shelf that had been knocked onto it. The perpetrator had been Rin, who was shaking after her rush of adrenaline. Hajime leaped forward and blasted a bullet at the Monokuma. He didn't think he would hit it so far away, and yet the shot was perfect. Maybe the hacking gun also had increased range?

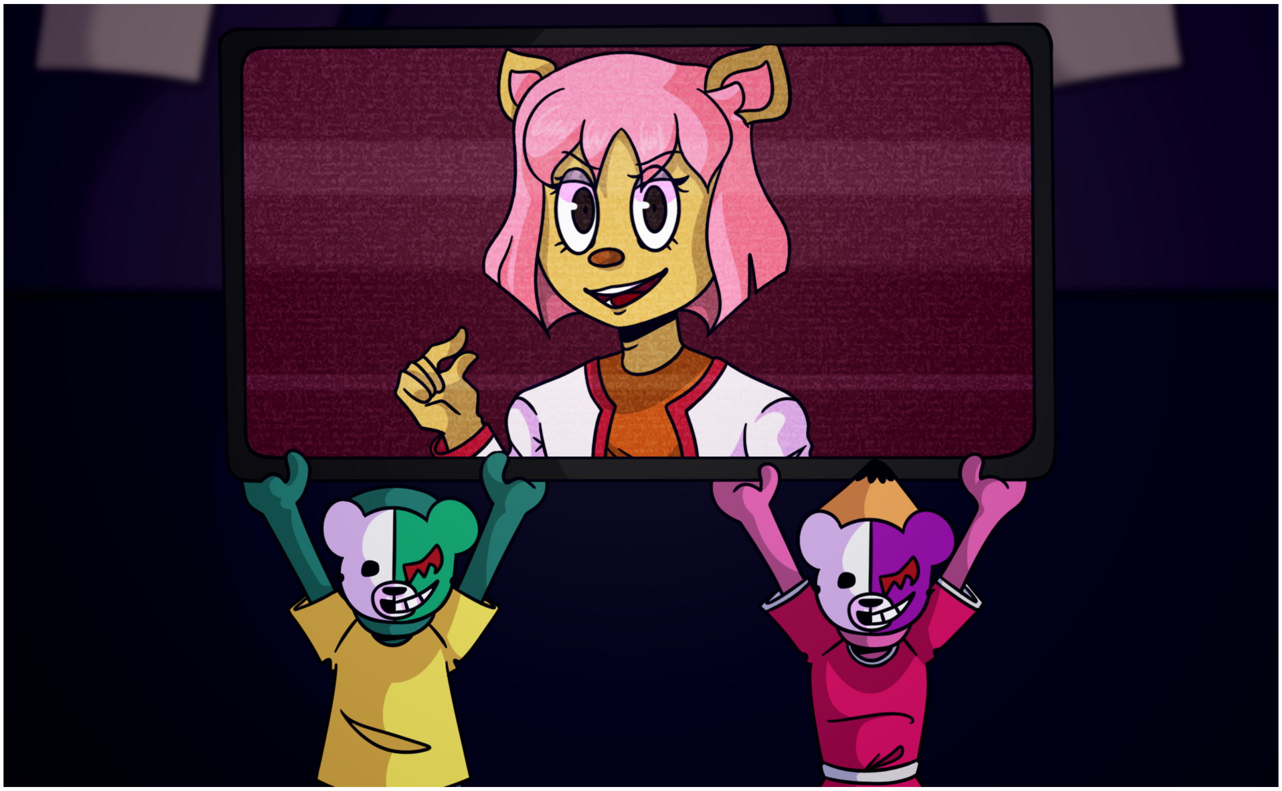
Not too long after, all the machines had been dealt with, and Hajime wiped his brow in repose. Once he had time to think clearly again, a concerning question popped into his mind: why were there active Monokumas in a locked subway anyhow?

"Are you alright, Rin?" Papyrus asked as Rin jogged back to the group.

"Y-Yeah." She sighed. "Thanks for helping me back there, Hajime."

Before Hajime could say that it was no problem, a jarring feedback started from the ceiling. Hajime shot his eyes up, and detected speakers attempting to leak light, cheery music. However with the pitch constantly wavering unrhythmically, it was far from comforting. Just then, two pairs of footsteps could be heard running from another pathway. Two young-looking figures appeared, faces both obscured by Monokuma masks (the right side in a miscellaneous colour). They were holding onto either end of a monitor screen in which they held above their heads in front of the group.

The monitor soon flickered on, displaying feed of a fox -- who looked similar to the cat and bear Hajime met yesterday -- who upon seeing she was live, began to laugh sadistically.



“Haha, finally! I’ve found you guys! Paula’s search and find scheme was a success!” She congratulated herself. “All the motive video survivors are mine first, and I found them all by myself! ...Well, it wasn’t *just* me if I have to be honest, but I don’t count that babbling idiot as help. You have to admit he’s kinda good at what he does but… Hrm, I’m getting off topic here! What I’m trying to say is that Sunny’s gonna be so pleased with me!” She crossed her arms with a smirk.

Hajime brows knitted. What was she talking about exactly? And, hang on, did she mention the motive video survivors?

“Although, why aren’t there more of you? Did the rest die or something?” The fox stared at the six.

“Actually!” Papyrus suddenly attested. “This isn’t all the motive video survivors! There’s a lot more!” Hajime turned to him with a worried look; he didn’t think it was necessary to disclose that. And he wasn’t the only one who thought so, as everyone else had turned to Papyrus with similar dismayed expressions.

In contrast, the fox’s eyes lit up as she grinned. “Oh? Is that really the case?”

“Indeed! The others are back at the base, which is--”

Smash .

Hajime spun around to see the monitor had been cracked, cutting off the video of the fox rather abruptly. He then realised a knife had been thrown into the screen. Raising a brow, he glanced at the group.

And saw Defoko standing with one hand up as if she had just thrown something.

She stared at the two figures holding the monitor with a look that could kill, like a dagger. They yelped and ran off in a hurry down the path they originated from. In turn, she impulsively twisted on her heel and paced out the subway, without a word.

“Erm…” Papyrus scratched his head, dazed on her reaction.

“Let’s just get the hell out of ‘ere.” Murdoc grumbled, and he and Taro began to trek back too.

The remaining three, Hajime, Papyrus and Rin, stared on for a moment. Hajime was unsure what this meant: should he be concerned? Afraid? He wasn’t sure. If anything, he wanted to feel disheartened that the subway was yet another failure in trying to escape the city. Even if they were going to go back to the church, he didn’t gain any relief from it. Even if he decided to go further into the subway without the others, he knew there was no way of telling if anymore Monokumas would be on the way.

So just what was going to happen next?

“Ugh! Ugh, ugh, ugh!!” Paula stomped her foot multiple times into the floor and she fumed. “Did they really break my monitor? *My* monitor? That was Sunny’s gift to me! They’re going to pay for that, those asses!”

As she calmed down, she started to wonder about something else. “Ah, but, what was that skeleton saying about the survivors again? More of them, huh? I wonder…” Paula wandered out of the room she was in, marching down an array of corridors and passing a few corners until she stopped outside a door. She swiftly knocked on the wood with her knuckles, wasting no time letting herself in.

“Heeey, Matt,” She purred. “Are ya busy right now?”

“A-Ah? Hah, ah, ahaha, Paula.” Matt spluttered, sharply whipping his head around to face her. “I’m, well, I’m a little caught up in some--something, actually, ah, so…” Paula tilted her head to look past his hunched up posture to see a figure behind him tied up to a chair.

“Hey, didn’t Sunny say we weren’t going to be targeting Parappa Town residents?” She ridiculed.

“Oh, u-um, I’m not, I’m not! Aha, you see, I’m just telling Shyman Sensei all the wonderful things we’ve been doing, isn’t, isn’t that right?” Matt stared back at the blue dog quivering against his restraints.

Paula shrugged it off with a grunt. “Uh-huh. So, could you do me a little favour? I’ve just found out that your location for the survivors was completely wrong! It’s not like I’m telling you you’re a useless and incompetent waste of space, but I’m just saying Sunny might think that about you if you don’t find the correct place.”

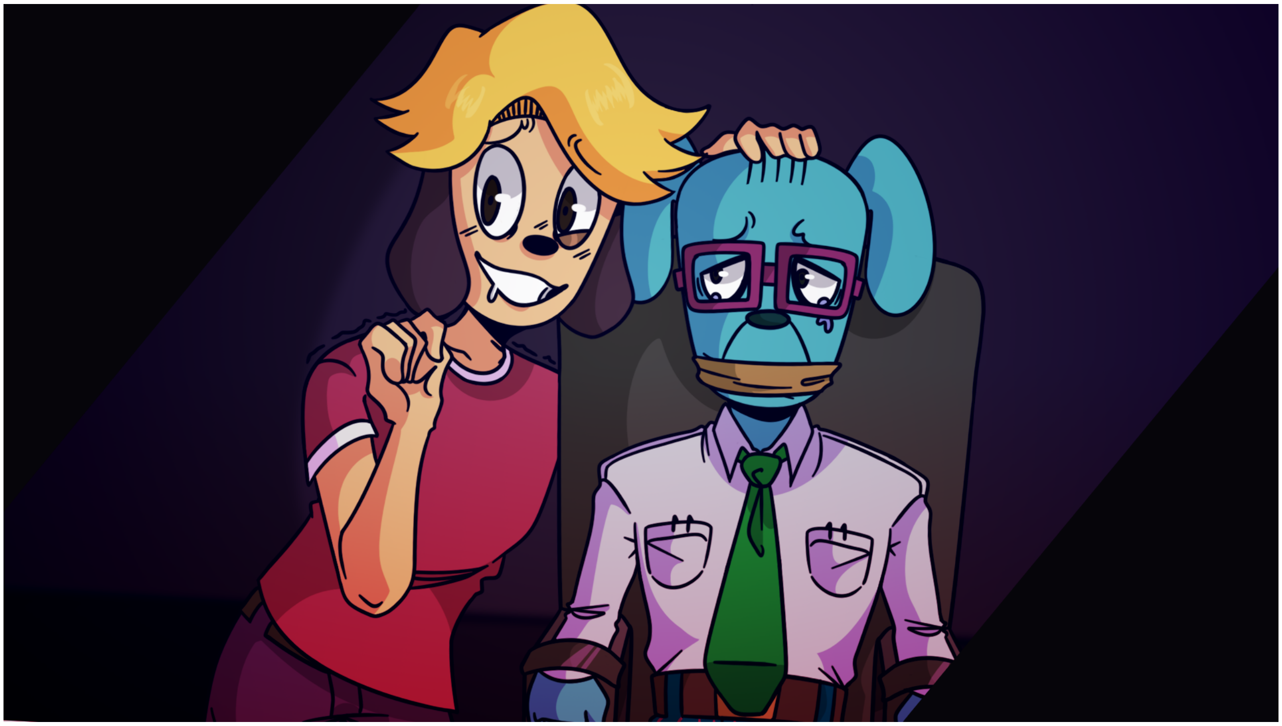
Matt paused, gripping onto the chair arm tightly. “And where, where would…?”

“Well I heard there’s a big base where all the survivors are staying for refuge, you know. But, I’m busy, and you’re much better at this than I am, so you need to find out where it is! For Sunny, of course.” Paula commanded.

“Ah, I see. That, I can do that. It won’t take long, haha, it won’t take long at all!” Matt giggled. “B-But, oh, I need, I need to do this first, I need to finish my session with Sensei. C-Can I? It’s important that I do it, please?” He pleaded.

“Why’re you asking me? Just get it over with quickly, okay?” Paula sassed, leaving the room in a huff.

Once he was alone again with Shyman, Matt trembled his hand over his tied up paw, and cooed. “N-Now then, Sensei, where were we? Ah, yes, we were talking about your anniversary, weren’t we? Haha, do you remember the last one? It was Parappa’s idea to surprise you.”



Then, Matt giggly smiled. “Parappa’s so great, isn’t he? Is he your favourite student? It’s okay if you say so, aha, I don’t care if it’s not me. I’m not like him -- you can’t even compare me to him. Ah, Parappa, Parappa, Parappa…”

Shyman whimpered under the duct tape over his mouth. Matt sighed.

“Do you want to, ah, I know, let’s see what Future Foundation is doing, huh?” Matt suggested, stumbling over to a monitor on the wall. He tapped haphazardly on the keyboard below, and on came a broadcast. It was a member discussing something with people off screen.

“What do you think about them, h-huh? I think they’re so interesting. I love it when they talk about the killing game. The survivors almost always are mentioned.” He gushed, rubbing his arm. “Once, there was a whole broadcast about them, and a whole section about Parappa. I rewatch that one a lot. Does that make me sound selfish? Ah, I can’t help it. I just want to… to…”

“Um, can they hear me?”

Matt froze, forgetting his entire train of thought. His eyes slowly raised to the monitor.

“Hello? Are any of my friends or family watching? Dad? Pinto? Sunny?”

Matt stared on.

“I want you all to know that I’m okay. And, while I’m a little scared, I’m continuing on with hope. Me and the other survivors are. Um, and, I believe that you’re all alive too. I believe in you all. Katy, PJ, Paula, Matt… You’re all believing in me too, right?”

Everything at once came crashing down on Matt. The trembling had stopped. He blinked, and the world looked different. *He* felt different.

“*... Parappa* ?”

Chapter End Notes

whispers poggers
Wow can you believe it a whole chapter without Sunny (sadly that won’t last forever huh)
Also Luka be my mother irl challenge
And a whole ass survivor base huh? I wonder what’ll happen next hehehsja

Chapter 4: Lending A Hand

Chapter Notes

> Heyyyy besties
> Sorry this chapter is late, I was very on and off this time lol, but I hope you enjoy it regardless! You may even need to prepare yourself for this one...
> Also!! There is a video in this chapter! As per usual, you'll find it under the underlined phrase!! Remember that because it's important to the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Thank you, thank you, ah, thank you for coming.”

Peach waved and shook hands with a sea of members that had begun to flood out of the conference room, making sure each and every one received a proper goodbye. Another morning meeting wrecked her tight sleeping schedule, but that wasn’t going to stop her from fronting as polite and bubbly as she could: positivity was contagious, she believed. Peach was quick to note how some members curtly refrained from touching her, while others attempted to give her a full-on hug. Nevertheless, she was glad there was less of an air of hopelessness within people.

At this point, Peach had just found herself mid-sentence in a delightful conversation with a few members about her leisurely plans (from what time she even had to relax), when she felt a calloused hand wrap around her sleeve and yank her away into the middle of the hallway. She gasped, only to turn her head and see none other than Munakata with one hand gripped onto an electronic handbook and the other on his hip.

“Have you forgotten the time?” Munakata half-scolded, gesturing to the handbook’s screen which displayed the time. “We have another conference to appear at in fifteen minutes.”

“Oh, my *utmost* apologies, Munakata.” Peach raised the pitch of her voice in mockery. Upon seeing his less than pleased reaction to her light-hearted jest, she cleared her throat. “I was just talking to a few of the members. I believe the mood has really improved amongst us, don’t you agree?”

“I haven’t really had the time to notice.” Is all he replied with.

“Well, I certainly have. I do think we should look into the well-being of the branch, it’s really important our spirits our as high as our work ethic--”

“Hey! Munakata!” Peach was interrupted as a hurried voice rang up the hallway. She glanced over to see a young man in uniform and spiky hair dash over to them, halting sharply on his heels.

“Oh, Makoto! It’s lovely to see you again!” Peach clasped her hands together.

“Oh, ah,” Makoto quickly bowed, “Good morning, Princess Peach.”

“Please, no formalities. I feel so alienated with it. Simply Peach is fine.” Peach assured, smiling.

“Makoto, I assume you have something to report.” Munakata interjected. “Or else you’ll be actively wasting our time with small talk.”

“No, no! I have something to report!” Makoto waved his hands in front of him awkwardly. He then grabbed a folder from under his arm and handed it to Munakata. “It’s about the survivors: they’ve all been formally appointed to their work divisions now. They’ve started their official work today.”

Munakata flicked through the file, and gave a small hum. “Everything seems to be in check then.” He then turned on his heel. “Come then, Peach. We have places to be.”

“Wait a minute!” Peach placed a hand on his shoulder. “That’s much too fast. And, isn’t this great news? This surely means we can visit them soon and--”

“We have no time.” Munakata shot, turning away from Peach. She huffed. How long did she have to wait to see the green plumber?

“Um, also,” Makoto hesitantly began, “There’s… something else that I wanted to bring up with you guys, in particular.”

“Oh?” Peach raised a brow.

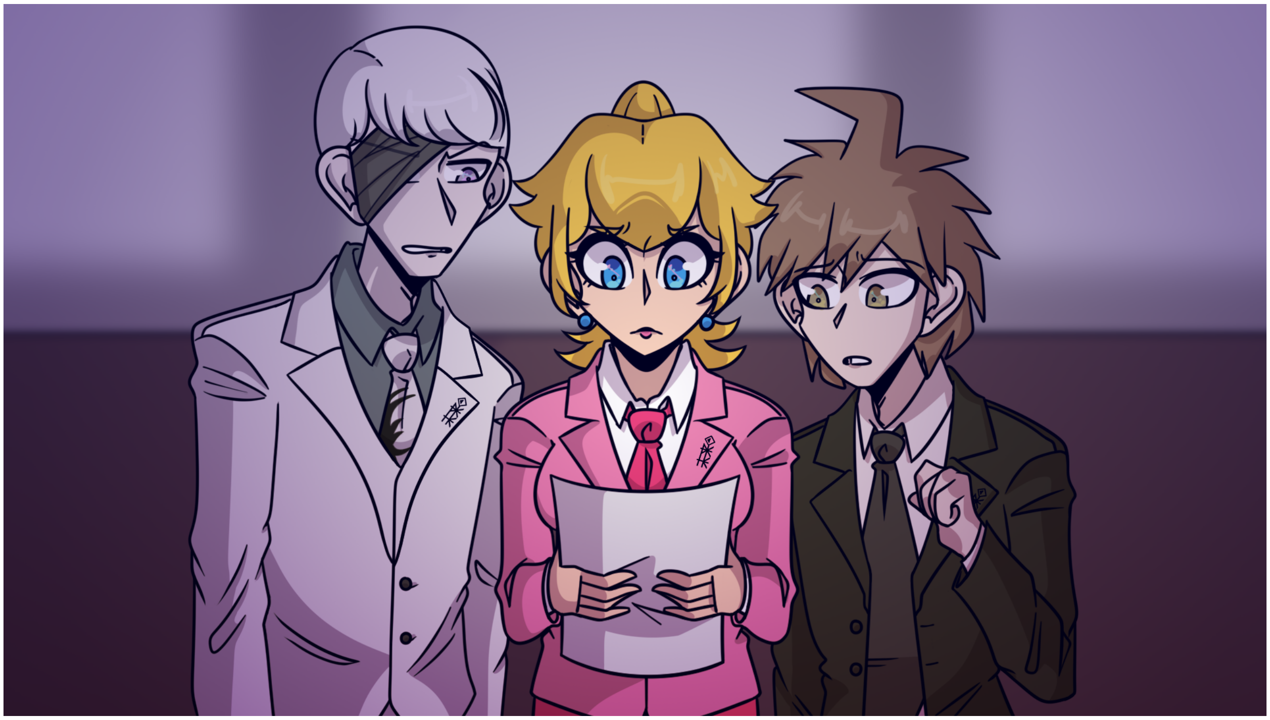
“We received something strange last night, from an unknown sender.”

“And? We get anonymous messages all the time. Just throw it out.” Munakata brushed off.

“Ah, well, it’s a little… You’ll have to see for yourself. I would’ve had Kyoko look at it, but she’s doing transfer work at the moment.” Makoto advised.

“I think we should look at it.” Peach gave Munakata a concerned look. Munakata gave in with a quick nod, and Makoto led them down a few corridors until they reached a lone office. Inside, he walked over to the desk and picked up an envelope. Peach followed his lead, peering over his shoulder to see the envelope in more detail: it was a light pink shade and written on the back was the words ‘TO FUTURE FOUNDATION’ in a red gel-like pen. Confused, she looked over at Munakata who simply shrugged.

Makoto offered Peach the envelope, which she gladly took. Opening it up and sliding the letter out, she faltered. The first thing she noticed, the first thing that definitely popped out at her was how the bottom of the page was smeared in a dried pink streak of what looked to be *blood* . She gulped, hoping she was wrong to think so morbidly about such a harmless appearing letter. And then, she finally read what the child-like scribbles on the page had to offer:



Dear Future Foundation,

I wanted to send a letter to show my skills as a big girl! I can write letters to big organisations, especially big organisations that lie about saving people! I know you're just pretending to help people, when really you're all just con-artists who love the ~~asstetitc astetic~~ aesthetic of being the world's hope. I think you should call yourselves FAILURE FOUNDATION!!!

But why am I sending you this letter, your little walnut brains might be asking? I'm planning something very very very fun and I want you all to know about it! It's like I'm inviting you to a birthday party, but I'm not ACTUALLY inviting you! I'm just telling you about it! I'll tell you about the decorations, the cake, the music, but you can't come! Haha!

Just know that I'm really excited to send you a pretty little gift soon that the WHOLE foundation can enjoy together! You know how you're always saying in your broadcasts that you're going to save survivors and stuff? Well what if they just suffered instead? That's 100x better than putting them under your crappy care!

I can't wait for the suffering to begin: for everyone that's wronged us, abandoned us, you should all feel ashamed! So ashamed that I should be allowed to spit on you and feed you to sharks!

They're going to hell, just like you guys!

~~D.M. xxx

Needless to say, a cold sweat trailed down the back of Peach's neck, tickling her nerves that stood on end. This looked like a child's writing, no, it definitely was a child's writing. So why would a child be writing something like this? Just why?

She looked at Makoto, preoccupied in his own terrified thoughts. She looked at Munakata, fists clenched in a bottled anger that was soon to manifest into shouting at anyone and everyone to find the culprit behind this 'sick joke'.

And Peach? Well, she had no idea what to think.

What could 'suffering' mean in an already suffering world?

Hajime continued to aimlessly polish his hacking gun with a dry washcloth, stretching his legs a little on his bed he was sitting on. The stained glass windows seeped through cream rays of sunlight that hit his back at such an angle that it was becoming uncomfortably hot just to sit there. Even if he lost track of time on exactly how long he had been sitting there uselessly cleaning his beyond spotless weapon, he didn't feel like getting up and doing anything else.

It was the day after the failed scavenge at the subway, and ever since the encounter with that Despair Melody member, Murdoc, Taro and Defoko had refused to talk to him and the others the whole way back, and then at dinner, and then even today. It wasn't like Hajime was oblivious as to why, but he believed being cold about such a situation would get them nowhere. Oh well, it's not like he could try saying that to them when they'd just block him out.

The grief of the hopeless escape route mixed with the beating sun on his back made Hajime exhausted. Perhaps closing his eyes wouldn't be such a bad idea; he was missing out on countless hours of sleep at this point, so maybe…?

"Hajime!" *Nevermind* . Hajime looked up, stumbled out of his cumbersome thoughts, to see Papyrus march into the room, face awfully painted in a deep and frantic fear repressed by a knitted brow. "I must speak to you right now, if that's alright with you!"

"Huh? Uh, yeah, that's," Hajime tried to speak as Papyrus took a hurried seat right next to him on the edge of the bed, making him lose a breath, "...that's fine."

Papyrus scooted closer, if there was even any room between them to begin with, and Hajime had to place a hand behind him to prevent himself from falling back from the sheer pressure of being so squished.

"I'm…" Papyrus began, then suddenly lowered his voice into a loud whisper, "I'm suspicious of Luka."

"Luka? What about her?" Hajime asked, unsure if he heard correctly.

"You see, earlier I witnessed Luka carrying a rather large box of electronic parts outside the church… I believe she was throwing them away!" Papyrus exclaimed in his whisper tone.

Hajime raised a brow. "And?"

"Well, don't you see what that means? She's throwing away potential parts to a communication device, don't you think?" Papyrus argued, his voice gradually returning to near normal volume at this point. "She's trying to remove all forms of contacting the outside, like Future Foundation!"

"That's, uh…" Hajime shook his head. "Are you sure she wasn't just throwing out scrap? I mean, Penny and Stewie are always working on random inventions and all…"

"You might be right, however! On the subject of those two, I also happened to see them working on an invention, only to almost immediately start packing it away when Luka walked into the room!" Papyrus attested his next anecdote. "Doesn't that sound fishy to you?"

Hajime finally made room between the two by shuffling away. "I don't know, Papyrus… It could just be a coincidence…"

"But!" Papyrus pointed down to Hajime's hacking gun resting in his lap. "Didn't you see how Luka reacted to your hacking gun when we returned from scavenging? She wouldn't even get close to you to give you a proper greeting!"

Hajime followed his gaze down to the gun, and pursed his lips. Sure, Luka *did* look a bit uncomfortable when he had it out, but he assumed it was more because it was a weapon she had never seen before, along with basically everyone else in the base.

"What exactly are you getting at here?" Hajime questioned, skepticism bleeding through his tone.

"Well, perhaps…" Papyrus had moved towards Hajime again, and Hajime at this point assumed he wasn't going to catch a break with this anymore. He let Papyrus cup his hand around his ear and lean down towards it. "Perhaps Luka isn't as good-aligned as we originally thought."

Hajime assumed that was what he was going to conclude with all this. It was ironic really: usually Hajime would be the one to be suspicious of everyone and everything. However, Luka had been nothing but sympathetic and selfless, basically proving herself to be the best individual to turn to out of the entire base. Despite her slight bias towards wanting to keep as many people as possible inside the church, her heart was in the right place, Hajime assumed. But, Papyrus was looking at him expectedly, so he had to say something.

"I'll, uh, have to think about that." Hajime finally replied.

“Hello?” A warm voice greeted. Hajime peered towards the doorway to see none other than Luka standing there with a loose grip on the doorframe.

“AH!” Papyrus less than nonchalantly jumped, causing Hajime to jolt back in an unprepared reaction. “U-Um, Luka! I… was just leaving! Yes, yes, I was just-- I have something-- matters I must attend to! At once! So I need to leave! Now!” Papyrus frantically stood up and dashed out of the room, considerably sweaty and not taking a second glance at Luka. Luka, on the other hand, leisurely watched him leave without much thought, although a slight confusion apparent on her face. Hajime groaned.

“Luka, I’m sorry about Papyrus. I have no idea what’s gotten into him, so…”

“Oh, no, it’s quite alright.” Luka assured. “I actually came here to talk to you, anyway. May I come in?”

“Me? Uh, sure, if you want.” Hajime shrugged as Luka gracefully stepped inside and sat a fair space away from him on the bed. Finally, some room to breathe, he thought.

Luka rested her hands together on her lap as she looked towards Hajime. “Defoko reported to me about your scavenging expedition yesterday, and how you all went to a subway.” Hajime nodded. “She also mentioned how you talked to a member of… the Despair Melody group. From what I gathered from the conversation, they want to find the motive video survivors. They want to find us. Is that right?”

“Well…” Hajime pondered for a moment. “I don’t know. They only mentioned ‘survivors’, but it’s likely that’s what they meant…”

“I feared that was the case.” Luka sighed. “Do you believe we’re in danger, Hajime? If so, I’m not sure what to do. I thought we were safe here, and to find another base on such short notice is…”

“Luka, hang on.” Hajime held a hand out to stop her from a melancholic tangent. He quickly composed his thoughts. “I have a feeling we’ll be okay. I mean, the subway is a long way away from where we are, and chances are that we'll be able to get out of here safely before anything happens."

"Do you really think so? It's hard to think so carefree, especially since everyone's well being is under my responsibility. They all have families, friends and priorities back home that need to be considered. I can't let what Miku's done to their hopes cloud them." Luka lamented.

"Trust me, this isn't carefree thinking. But… I understand where you're coming from. I've also felt that responsibility to want to protect people, probably as literally as this…" Hajme had to agree.

"Oh, really?" Luka inquired. "Perhaps we aren't too different then. What about you then, Hajime? There must be people you're missing right now."

Hajime shifted his gaze to the floor. "I… I guess so. My classmates, no, uh, friends back at Future Foundation. We're all in the same branch, so we're all pretty close still."

"That's nice to hear. Anyone in particular you want to see again?"

"Well, aside from Nagito, the person I was forced to film for, I would like to see one friend again, uh, Chiaki." Hajime admitted.

"Oh, so that's who your motive video message was for. But, who's Chiaki?" Luka questioned further.

"This may sound weird, but, Chiaki is an AI. She hasn't always been an AI; she *was* a real person. But, due to unfortunate circumstances, she now lives on as one." Hajime attempted to explain. "She's probably one of the closest to me out of everyone, and I talk to her a lot too. You know, about this and that… She's a good listener, despite her head constantly glued to a video game screen."

"Aw, she sounds lovely, Hajime." Luka beamed warmly. "I hope you two can reunite soon."

Hajime nodded. “Yeah… me too.”

“Oh, but I’m also happy to see you eating a healthy amount again. You should keep up on that, you know. If you have any particular meal requests, just tell me.” Luka urged gleefully.

“W-What? I don’t, uh, that was just a one time thing okay?” Hajime defended. “I don’t need you looking over that anymore…”

“Hey, uh, Luka,” Hajime turned to the doorway to see Penny tapping her index fingers together idly. “Squidward and Escargoon are fighting again…”

Luka looked at her with upturned brows. “Again? I hope it’s not too severe…”

“Don’t worry, I don’t think they’re gonna get violent or anything! But it’s kinda loud…” Penny scratched the back of her head. Hajime paused: had they gotten violent before?

“It’s alright, I’ll sort it out.” And with that, Luka stood up. “I’m sorry to cut our conversation short, Hajime, but I need to keep in-fighting to a minimum.”

“No, no, I get it. It’s more important you deal with that, anyway.” Hajime insisted, and Luka left with Penny in tow. Now that he had time to himself again, Hajime heaved himself off the bed to give him limbs a proper stretch. He really hadn’t done much today, and at this point he had become restless to just do something instead of nothing. Pacing around the room wasn’t going to do much in terms of fulfillment, so he decided to wander out to the main hall. There, he noticed Papyrus and Rin conferring with each other at the church’s front entrance. Curious, he walked over.

“What’re you guys doing over here?” He asked as the two noticed him.

“Oh, Hajime, there you are!” Papyrus grinned. “Rin and I were just discussing how yesterday’s expedition didn’t go as well as we hoped, so we proposed that we go out again for the rest of the group! And so, we believe you should join us too.”

“Huh? Do the others know about this? Have you asked them about tagging along too?” Hajime glanced behind him to see who was also in the main hall.

“Um, well,” Rin started meekly, “We *did* try asking them, but they still won’t respond to us… At all.”

“I figured so…” Hajime muttered under his breath. “But, sure, I’ll come along.”

“Nice! We make such a good team, ne?” Rin folded her hands behind her head.

“Indeed we do!” Papyrus affirmed.

Hajime shrugged. He believed it was better to go along with them than anyone else here, that was for sure.

* * *

Tick. Tick.

The clock ticked achingly slow. The sharp sound rang in his ears like bullets. Bullets that would never reach him, but bullets that stung all the same. Sitting there at his desk in the middle of the pitch black room; nothing but a simple monitor light illuminating his face; shoulders hunched and hands folded on his lap, trembling ever so slightly.

Matt stared down at the work on the desk.

Could he even call this ‘work’? What was all of this, anyway? Work: something he would call his textbooks, his homework, his attempts at real world priorities like his parent’s taxes and invoices. Work would be neat, clear, orderly. Work would be what his teachers praised, what his friends envied.

Work wasn’t blueprints of killing machines encased in a bear mold, or maps with scribbles and crosses around ‘eliminated targets’, or heaps upon heaps of diary entries about his deepest, most personal desires.

And yet, it was all there, right in front of him. All with his name on them, too.

Matt raised a hand to the desk, taking a moment to register his nerves that it was his own. He gripped his fingers around the closest thing to him -- a map of sorts -- almost missing at first. Raising it to his face, he darted his eyes around the contents. His handwriting, his shorthand, his penmanship: all there. It was laughable, if his throat wasn’t so painfully dry: he remembered writing this. He remembered it all.

Why didn’t he stop himself?

This was for a good cause, wasn’t it?

How ?

“Matt!”

Matt shot up from his seat so frantically that he held back a yelp of headrush. The map fluttered down to the floor and he whipped his head to look behind him.

“Are you done yet? Jeeze, and I thought you said this wouldn’t take long…” It was Paula. She strided into the room and placed a hand on her hip.

Matt didn’t reply.

“ *Hello* ? Earth to Matt? I said have you finished locating the survivor base yet? Sunny’s gettin’ kinda impatient, you know. You wouldn’t want to upset her, would you? I know I wouldn’t, and it’s gonna be all your fault if you don’t show me any results soon.” She raised her voice, walking closer to him. Matt turned his body fully to face her, but refused to look her in the eye.

Paula stopped, raising a brow. “What’s gotten into you?” She leaned forward. “I don’t *want* to be mad at you. But, as I said, Sunny really wants to--”

“I-I don’t think…”

“Huh? What was that?” Paula demanded.

“...”

“Just spit it out, dumbass--”

“THIS ISN’T RIGHT!” Matt snapped, curling his fists. “W-What we’re doing, it’s not right! It’s not… It’s not us!” Upon realising what he just said, Matt tensed up, smacking his hands over his mouth tightly, as if trying to retract the words he so blatantly made apparent.

Paula stood there for a moment, face blank. Matt felt like he was waiting for eons before her brow arched down and turned her wide eyes into a scowl.

“What the… *hell* did you just say?” She seethed, striding over to him with a closed fist. Matt tried to step back, but only hit the desk behind him. Before she could strike him, however, a voice rang out into the room:

“Is everything okay in here?”

Both Matt and Paula turned to the doorway to see Sunny, Katy and PJ, the former frowning and tilting her head in an innocent manner. With three times as many eyes on him, Matt couldn't move. Paula, on the other hand, was quick to drop her fist and rush over to Sunny.

"Sunny, everything in here is just fine!" Paula reassured, then took a long side glance at Matt. "But…"

"But what?" Sunny inquired.

"Something weird's gotten into Matt. I have no freakin' idea what, but he believes he can just say and do whatever he wants now without thinking about you or what you've done for us!" Paula crossed her arms. Matt felt his fur stand on end. What was she talking about?

Sunny followed the gaze over to Matt, her eyes large and unblinking. She was staring at him, for an uncomfortably long time, as if she was contemplating something, something he'd never understand. And then, she smiled.

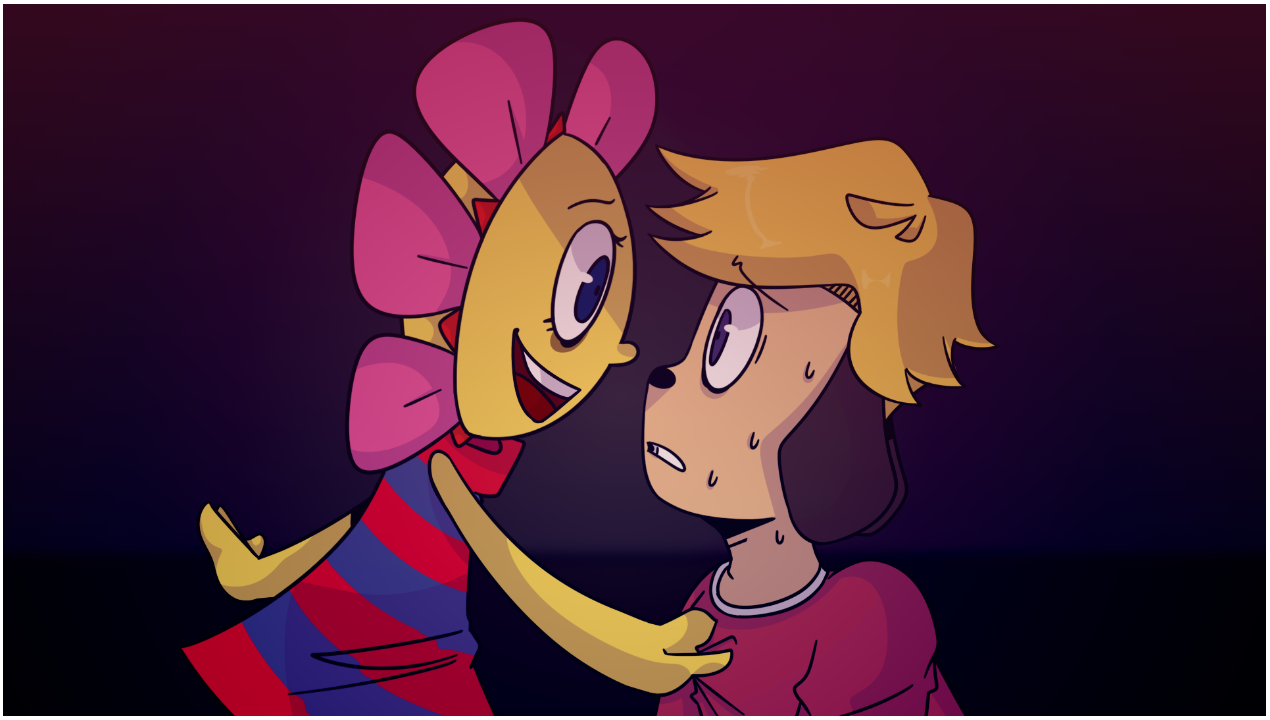
"Aw, Matt," Sunny began, walking towards him slowly but with a noticeable spring in her step, "Are you doing alright? Do you have a fever? Working all the time must make you so tired, huh?"

Matt gulped, gripping onto the desk behind him. "W-What…?"

Once she was mere inches away from him, Sunny stared up at him from her smaller height. "I mean, surely that's why you've suddenly said something out of place, huh? You're obviously not feeling so well… And, if that's the case…"

WHAM.

Matt felt a jolting pain surge up his leg as he felt his knee be kicked in, causing him to crash to the floor. Before he could hit the ground, however, a hand grabbed the collar of his shirt and jerked him up right before Sunny's face.



“You should probably cut the crap, huh? Stay in your lane, and you'll feel better. Did you forget why we’re doing this or something? And here I thought I could rely on your brains out of everyone here… Don’t you want Parappa to be proud of us? Of *you* ?” Her grip became tighter, and Matt couldn’t help but flinch. “So then, be a good dog and follow orders, okay?”

Matt couldn’t be any more out of it than he already was. He nodded without a second thought, whimpering.

“Good!” Sunny beamed and let go of him, finally sending him thudding onto the floor. “Well, I guess since you’re so sick that you can’t finish a simple task, I’ll have to transfer your work over to someone else. Come on, everyone, let’s leave and let Matt reflect on his poor little illness.” Leaving on that note, Sunny turned and led the others out of the room, who were more than happy to comply.

Matt remained there on the ground, unable to move. A muscle in his finger twitched every so often, and his lip quivered, but other than that he was still. He couldn’t pinpoint any emotion he was feeling right now, unsure if he was feeling anything at all.

He didn’t understand. Not one bit.

These weren’t his friends.

* * *

The three had been trekking about in the city for only a little while, but Hajime felt a lot more refreshed than his previous sitting around. Sure, once again he was left out of an energetic tennis match-like back and forth between Papyrus and Rin, but it was his choice to opt out. Someone had to keep an eye out for Monokumas, anyway.

“Hey, so, what’re we looking for again?” Hajime mindlessly asked aloud. “In terms of this scavenge, I mean.”

“I dunno, actually… I guess food and stuff.” Rin shrugged.

“And where exactly were you planning to find ‘food and stuff’?” Hajime berated.

“There should always be a store nearby, correct? That’s how cities work, after all!” Papyrus confidently insisted.

“Like over there?” Rin pointed towards an oncoming convenience store.

Hajime deadpanned. “How convenient…”

When they reached the store’s doors, Hajime was able to take a better peer inside the front windows to see that most of the isles inside were still intact, and hopefully with food stacked on them. After swiftly cracking one door open and scanning the inside with his gun for potential threats, he walked inside with the others.

“Alright,” He began, “Chances are, not much of the food here will be edible. We need to search for perishables, anything that hasn’t been ruined we can still eat. So, if we start with--”

Hajime cut himself off, realising Papyrus and Rin were no longer next to him. But, if the sounds of running and giggling didn't give it away, it was obvious that they were more focused on finding 'spaghetti' and 'ice cream' respectively, if he strained his ears hard enough. Hajime rolled his eyes. At least *he* could bring back something the group could actually eat.

Moving down an aisle, Hajime examined the store for anything worth taking. He fancied how it reminded him of Rocketpunch market on Jabberwock, how he could literally swipe anything without having to pay for it. Although, there it was more on terms with an all-inclusive vacation, where here it was simply because whatever potential shopkeeper that used to own this place was far gone (or fallen victim to a Monokuma). And then it didn't fancy him any longer.

Shaking that thought aside, Hajime noticed a few cans, and his face eased a little. He wasn't exactly sure how Luka and the others prepared food in the kitchen, on the account of the fact he'd never actually been in the kitchen, but he was sure they would appreciate--

"E-Eep!"

Hajime held back his outstretched hand. His head shot to the direction of the scream, and with only a moment's delay, promptly sped over to the nearby aisle. There, he caught sight of Rin dead-still, eyes locked onto something halfway down the aisle. And that something was a Monokuma: stained in thick pink, clawing at a lifeless pulp of a thing once breathing. Hajime had the immediate urge to turn away, go back to ten seconds ago when he was staring at bland cans, but that was useless thinking.

"Hey," He called out through gritted teeth, causing Rin to jolt slightly, "Get behind me." She noiselessly tiptoed backwards, shuffling to get behind his back. Briefly noticing her tense expression ease a little, he was hit with a pang of condolence.

Wasting no further time, Hajime raised his hacking gun and steadied his aim for the Monokuma's eye. Just one shot and it would be dealt with.

"Oh ho, guys, you'll never guess what I found!" The two jerked up as a rather upbeat Papyrus declared himself into the aisle beside them, holding up a half-full basket. "Alright, I'll just tell you, it's spa--"

“ *SHHH* !” Hajime seethed, glancing at him with the most fumed look he could muster. However, it was too late, as when he turned to look back down the aisle, the Monokuma was already staring at them intently, its beady eyes wide and unnerving. And then, another Monokuma poked its head out from around a corner. And then another. And then yet another. Soon, a small crowd had formed, simply watching the three.

Papyrus gradually lowered the basket. “ *Oh* .”

At once, one of the Monokumas shrieked out a sickening laugh, and pounced at the group, the others following suit.

“Crap!” Hajime practically sprung backwards. “C’mon!” He beckoned the two to start running and the three fled down the aisles, the army of robots hot on their tails. It didn’t take too long to reach the entrance considering they hadn’t wandered too far into the store, thankfully. They skid out the front doors, Hajime sharply turning on his heels to crash his back against the doors, temporarily locking them up. Papyrus joined in too before the sheer weight of the Monokumas pushing back almost won.

“H-Hang on, I’ll go find something to keep the doors shut!” Rin announced as she dashed off. She appeared from behind a corner wielding a rusting pipe too dense for her to carry without almost tripping once or twice. Hajime and Papyrus took it from her and shoved it between the handles, seeing as the Monokumas tried to barge out but to no avail against the pipe.

Stepping back from the mess, Hajime tugged at his collar. This constant action kept making him hot, which in turn kept making him more exhausted.

“Well, that sure was a close one!” Hajime heard Papyrus boast firmly. “However, it was thanks to our immaculate teamwork that we managed to--”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Hajime retorted, feeling his blood beginning to boil. “ *You* were the one that caught the Monokumas’ attention! And who knows how long until we find another convenience store like this before we have to go back -- this trip’s basically been useless!”

“What do you mean? This has not been useless at all! I managed to hold onto my basket of food, see?” Papyrus intercepted defensively, holding out the basket. Hajime, still in dismay, finally looked to see what exactly he had picked up.

It was all spaghetti.

Needless to say a nerve snapped in Hajime that day.

“Are you kidding me?! We can’t eat this, you idiot! I told you to look for perishables!” He exploded, clenching his fists as he subconsciously leaned forward in aggravation.

“Excuse me, why not?!” Papyrus argued back. “Everyone knows spaghetti doesn’t go bad for at least a year! We could live off this, you know!”

“Why the hell would we?! Are you really expecting everyone to just eat *this* ?! And have you not even considered what happens if we lose electricity?! We’ll just have a worthless pile of crap we can’t even eat!” Hajime retaliated.

“Oh, and you think eating from cans is any better?!”

“Do you not understand how this works?! We have no choice in this situation!”

“Hey! Hey! S-Stop it!”

Hajime faltered, face drawing to a blank. And then, sounds of sobbing filled the sudden silence. Who was crying? Even Papyrus had picked up on it, eyes wide. They slowly turned to the sound, and there stood the last trio member, Rin, gawking upon the two with floods threatening to spill from her large, angry eyes.

“Rin?” Hajime questioned, apprehensively walking over to her.

“What’s wrong??” Papyrus added, rushing over to her side.

Rin paused, her expression becoming more meek. “U-Um, it’s just that… I don’t like watching you guys fight, y-y’know?” She avoided looking directly at either of the two, preferring the ground once again. “It, um, reminds me of… w-when a bunch of fights broke out when Miku started to take over the… the…”

When Rin gave up trying to explain herself with her hoarse voice, Hajime and Papyrus both glanced at each other knowingly; they could sense the guilt on one another’s faces.

“Rin, I… I’m sorry for making you uncomfortable.” Hajime apologised. “And, Papyrus, I’m sorry for losing my temper like that. I shouldn’t have, uh, called you an idiot.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“No, I apologise to you, Hajime, for not listening to your instructions and getting us into that chase.” Papyrus insisted back. “I also realise now that I didn’t take into account the possibility of losing electricity.”

Rin looked up at them, and smiled through her red face. “You guys are okay now, right?” And then she thought for a moment. “But… I’m not convinced you won’t do that again.”

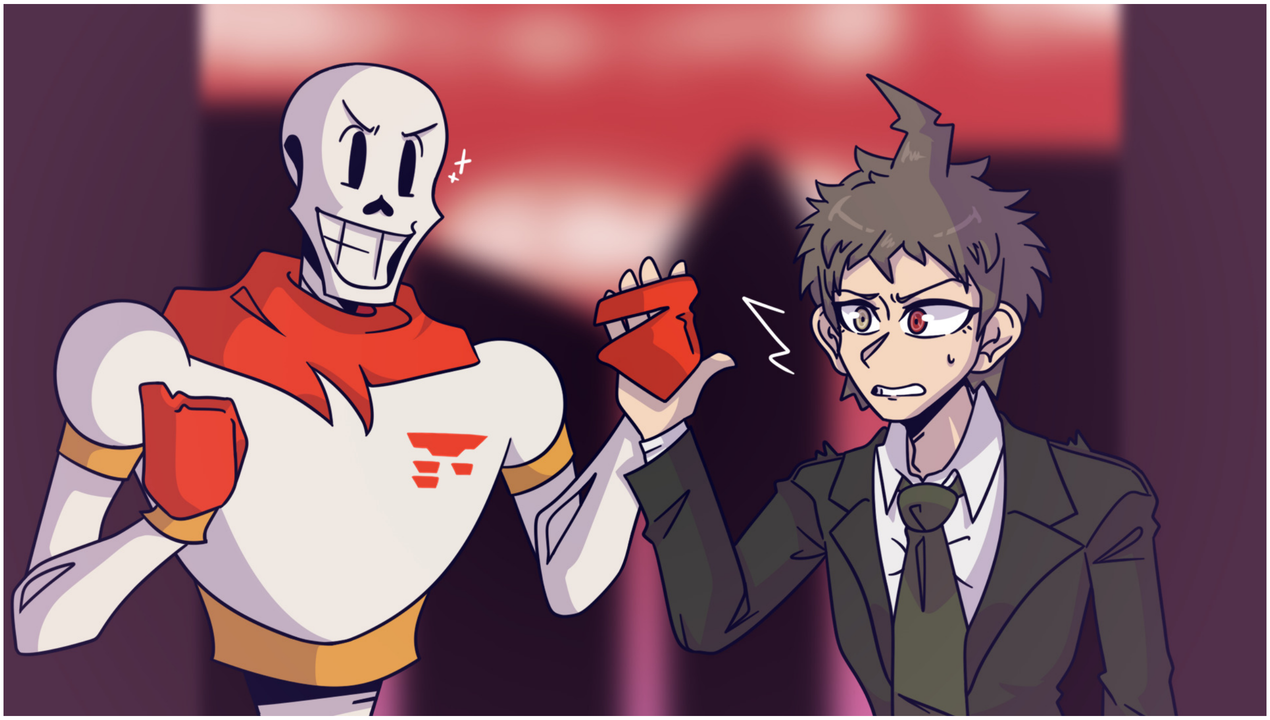
Hajime raised a brow. “Then what will?”

“I dunno…” She half-smirked, half-flushed, “Maybe you two could… hold hands for the rest of the day to prove you can get along?” She quickly prompted.

“W-What? What?!” Hajime exclaimed, utterly lost out of his mind. “Why the hell would we do that?”

“Oh, c’mon, it’s not that bad! Luka made Kaito and Gakupo do that once and they managed to get along not long after!” Rin pleaded with a whine.

“But we’re not some happy-go-lucky idols that’ll magically become the best of friends--” Hajime was cut off when he suddenly felt his right hand be grabbed in a strong grip by Papyrus. “Hey, what the hell are you doing?!”



“I think it’s a great idea, actually!” Papyrus cheered. “We shall prove our bond with this challenge!”

“But it’s not a challenge!” Hajime tried to argue, but Papyrus only squeezed his hand. “Ugh, Fine… But can you at least hold my hand properly?”

“Apologies!” Papyrus repositioned so Hajime didn’t feel like his hand was being squeezed off.

“Yay~!” Rin clapped her hands together.

“So, uh, where exactly should we head next? We probably still have time to find somewhere close by before it gets dark…” Hajime wondered aloud.

“Oh, Hajime, don’t you still have the map with you?” Papyrus pointed towards his pockets.

“Huh? Yeah, I do actually.” Hajime then gestured to his hacking gun in his other hand. “But, my hands are kinda full right now considering--”

“Not to worry! I’ll retrieve it for you!” And just like that, Papyrus had dived his free hand into Hajime’s pocket, causing him to reflectively jolt and tense up.

“H-Hey! You can’t just-- Get out of my--”

“Here we are!” Papyrus had taken out of the map and was now unfolding it, and Hajime could only groan. However, that again proved difficult with one hand, so Rin had to hold up the map for them. After a brief scan of their current whereabouts, they decided upon a nearby marketplace that would provide them with fresh produce (granted if any Monokumas hadn’t dug in there first). Further into the streets, Hajime’s thoughts had drifted back over to what Rin said about Miku. And then, he became inquisitive.

“Hey, Rin, you don’t have to answer this but, did you have any idea about Miku’s plans to do all this beforehand?” He asked her.

“Um, well, not really…” Rin idly began, “She always acted her usual self, cheerful and friendly and stuff, but her sudden change felt like the flick of a switch. None of us saw it coming…”

“And what happened when she did?” Papyrus tilted his head.

“When she did… Everything happened so fast. It was like one of those movies where all the people are walking down the street or drinking at a café, and then suddenly the bad guy appears out of nowhere and starts destroying stuff. Some of us tried to fight back, most of us just fled.” Rin twiddled with the zip on her jacket. “I don’t really remember how I was kidnapped with my friends and forced to film the motive video, honestly…”

Hajime had to admit to himself how similar that sounded to the first tragedy: despair can spread faster than people realise. However, he also had to admit how it seemed like no one could remember how they were kidnapped for the motive video. It was strange. Really strange. Perhaps Miku erased their memories of the event? Or was it something else entirely?

“I also don’t remember how *I* was kidnapped either,” Papyrus declared, “All I seem to recall was how someone told me that Sans was trapped in a ‘killing game’. It made me rather worried at the time.” Hajime thought back to his motive video: Papyrus sure did seem quite in distress.

“Ah, I forgot to say this before but, you’ve been really strong about your brother, Papyrus.” Rin confessed.

“Well, of course! I know Sans: he’s not one to give up his determination that easily!”

Rin blinked. “Huh? What do you mean? Isn’t he--”

“Oh, uh, I can see the marketplace over there! I guess we’ve made it, huh?” Hajime interrupted Rin, feeling his forehead become faintly moist with nerves. That was becoming difficult to watch. Maybe he’d tell Rin later without Papyrus around to hear.

Unfortunately, as they came into clearing, the anguish of Monokuma’s had risen again, as a hoard patrolled up and down the narrow way between the stalls. The more Hajime looked, the more they appeared to be almost in sync; troops of despair is what first came to his mind.

“Alright, if we’re going to get anything from here, we have to be cautious and stay low.” Hajime instructed.

“Hum,” Rin put a finger to her chin, “But, if we all go together at a time we’re gonna be too slow, right?”

"I guess so, but…"

"Then we should split up! I'll look at the right stalls and you two take the left!" Rin grinned at her idea.

"That's not equal at all!" Papyrus pointed out.

"Yeah, but, you two need to keep holding hands so I don't mind!" Rin simply shrugged.

"I don't think that's the point…" Hajime tried to irritatedly argue, but Rin had already skipped off at that point. He attempted to call out for her, but stopped himself just in case he'd draw the attention of a nearby bear. "I guess we should just… go then."

"This way then!" Papyrus made a B-line for the left stalls, dragging Hajime behind him. Crouching down, the two tried to crawl behind the stalls, although it was more like an awkward shuffle considering they had to keep their hands locked together. Talk about a three-legged race: this was just as, if not more, ridiculous than what Hajime would've anticipated for that day. He was a little glad Papyrus was wearing gloves because otherwise he'd be able to feel how clammy his hand had gotten up to that point (then again, without the gloves it'd just be bones — could his bones feel like a nervous system?).

"Papyrus," Hajime defeatedly began, "we could probably just let go of our hands, you know. Rin isn't watching, and we're making this harder for ourselves than it has to be…"

Papyrus looked over at him, taken aback. "But, Hajime, it's not just about Rin! This is for us, and our relationship! Don't you feel it working like I do?"

"Don't word it like *that* …" Hajime chastised. However, he knew Papyrus had the strongest grip out of the two of them, so if he wasn't going to budge, there was no point in pestering him further. Furthermore, maybe Papyrus had a point: maybe this was meant to sort themselves out. Eventually, they found a stall that was not destroyed nor rotten: it appeared to have decently fresh fruit and vegetables. Swiping a thin paper bag from the side of the stall, they picked out a mixed range of produce.

“I just don’t understand how this is different from bringing back spaghetti…” Papyrus muttered aloud.

“Well, firstly, we can still eat these even if we can’t cook them. And, having a wider option of food goes down better with people, right?” Hajime pointed out, hiding the bafflement in his voice that this needed to be addressed at all. He continued to fill the bag as he watched Papyrus ponder out of the corner of his eye.

“I think this is enough, do you think we should—“

“Eek! H-Help, Hajime! Papyrus!”

The two immediately shot up to their feet upon hearing the cry of Rin. Hajime noticed her on the opposite side of the market, swinging a wooden signpost around in an attempt to fend off approaching Monokumas. They dashed over to her, Hajime whipping out his hacking gun from the backside of his belt. Shooting down a Monokuma in Rin’s way, she immediately flung herself towards them.

“I-I’m sorry, I made a noise and they noticed and—“

“It’s okay! Take this and go find somewhere safe to hide!” Papyrus commanded as he handed her the bag of fruit and vegetables. She did so, running out the direction they came from. “Right then, Hajime, let’s— Hey!”

Hajime had turned to blow a bullet into a Monokuma on the right.

“What was that for?!” Papyrus demanded.

“What?! It was going to attack us!” Hajime shouted back. Suddenly, he felt his body be jerked to the left. “What the hell?!”

“I’m sorry, but there are monsters over here!” Papyrus fumed.

Only then did Hajime realise they were *still* holding hands.

“Ah, sh— Follow my movements!” Hajime directed. “To the right— no *my* right!” Eventually Papyrus caught on so Hajime could take out oncoming robots on his side.

“To the left!” Papyrus announced and Hajime followed suit, allowing him to attack Monokuma’s on his side. This managed to successfully continue for a while, as the two wiped out the robots a lot quicker than they usually did without being confined together by their hands.

As they fled the marketplace to meet back up with Rin, they saw her gaze at them with sparkles in her eyes. She clapped her hands together.

“Whoa, you guys looked so cool out there! You were so in sync like you were in a superhero movie!” She praised.

“The Great Papyrus always looks good in battle, you see! Especially with my exceptionally quick-witted partner!” Papyrus put a firm hand to his chest.

“It really wasn’t that hard to come up with the idea.” Hajime shrugged. “But we really need to get you a weapon of your own soon…” He added, turning to Rin.

At this point the three decided — with their lone bag of fruit and vegetables — to finally trek back to the survivor base. The sky was painted over in a stark darkness the time they arrived back, and both Rin and Papyrus were practically bouncing on their heels in anticipation to announce what they brought back for the group. Hajime had to admit it was slightly charming.

“Hey, guys! Luka! Guess what we brought back!” Rin called out to the huddle of people in the middle of the church’s main hall. Wait — why were they bunched up like that? Hajime couldn’t help but knit his brows together. In fact, the more he looked on, the more he realised that none of the group appeared the slightest bit happy, no, they were restless: complaining, shouting, faces red-hot and ice cold seemingly at once. Just what had happened while they were gone?

“Oh, thank god, there you three are!” Luka came rushing towards them. She looked one of the most out of it; her heavy eyelids and pale complexion spoke volumes. Hajime noticed her flinch slightly when she caught sight of his hacking gun, which made him reflect back to what Papyrus had told him this morning. He curtly clipped it back onto his belt.

“Huh, Luka? What’s going on? What happened?” Rin asked, holding the paper bag closely to her chest.

“Ah, you see…” Luka bit her lip, then sighed. “Penny had overheard my conversation with Hajime this morning about Despair Melody, and then proceeded to tell Stewie about it, with no ill intention I assume. However, one thing led to another and he must’ve told everyone else about it as now they’re all getting worked up over it.” She glanced towards the group who had caught her attention by becoming louder and rowdier.

“What? That’s nonsense!” Papyrus spoke up, much to Luka’s confusion. He then proceeded to march towards the unruly crowd. “Everyone! There is nothing that you should be worrying about! This evil group you may have heard of cannot do anything to harm us!”

“What the bloody hell are you talking about, mate?!” Murdoc was the first to take a jab back at him. “You were the wanker who told that furry thing about the base!”

“H-Huh?”

“Hey! What’s your problem?” Hajime sped over to Papyrus’ side. “He’s just trying to calm you guys down, alright?! And anyway, it’s not like he intended to reveal this place — he never said anything about the location, remember?”

“But it was a pretty bad idea, you know?” Taro added in.

“It wasn’t just bad, it was plain idiotic.” Defoko narrowed her eyes at them.

“What if they were tracking your location?! Then we’re doomed! Doomed, I say!” Escargoon yelled.

The group began to uproar again, and at this point neither Papyrus nor Hajime could say anything that would garner their attention.

“What is Despair Melody? Are they going to attack us?”

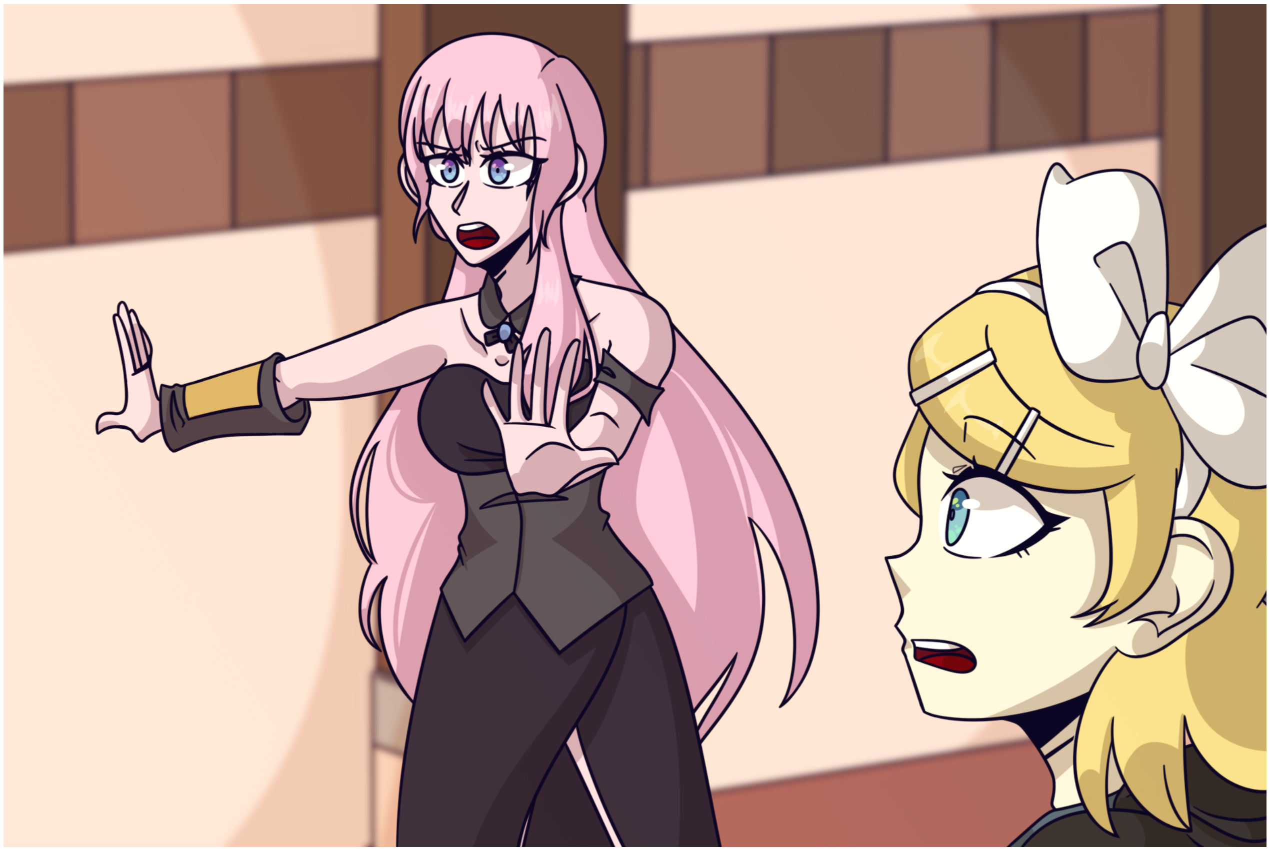
“What’re they gonna do to us? What do they want from us?”

“Are we going to die?!”

“QUIET!”

Everyone froze. Even Hajime was taken aback himself at the cry against the complaints of the group. Without a moment's hesitation, Luka strode up and stood tall, overlooking each and every one of the survivors.

“Huh? Luka…?” Rin quietly awed.



“This— This isn’t like us! This is not how I told you all how to behave in a situation like this! When I found you all, I assured you that you would be safe from the jeopardy this world has grieved, and I have yet to fail you on that. This place, this *home* , is a sanctuary for the people I firmly believe can carry on the morality of our world despite damage brought upon it.” Luka then slowly inhaled, closing her eyes and opening them with a firm glint within them. “Until I take my last breath for whatever cause, I will protect you all, no matter the cost and no matter the will I have to sacrifice. We *will* get through this, even if Despair Melody tries to make that a problem. They could never compare to the hell Miku has already caused.”

The group stared on at her for a while, soaking in all that she had said. Hajime, for one, was impressed, as he saw many of the survivors ease into solace, or at least a fraction of it. He hadn’t heard a speech like that since the imposter on their first days on Jabberwock.

Hajime was about to turn to Papyrus when—

“Hey, who locked the door?”

“Huh?” He turned to the source of the voice to see Squidward trying to turn the front entrance’s handles to no avail.

“What? The door’s locked?!” Rarity gasped. She and a few others looked at each other before racing over to pry at the door.

“But, we didn’t lock the door…” Papyrus thought aloud beside Hajime. “In fact, I didn’t think the door had a lock at all!”

“Me neither…” Hajime replied subconsciously, cogs turning in his mind at a gaining pace. He watched on, helplessly puzzled, as the group’s fear steadily bubbled back.

And almost instantaneously there was a sharp crashing sound, and time seemed to slow.

Something had flown through one of the stained glass windows, shattering it to fractured pieces scattered around the hall’s floor. Fractions of tinted glass bounced light around the room, making the unknown object that had dropped to the floor as well even harder to focus on. Hajime squinted his eyes, and just barely made out a cream grenade-like thing, which promptly began to exhaust a cloudy gas in the same manner as a burst of air from a fire bellow.

The people at the door — who happened to be closest to the gas — quickly became queasy. And just like that they had dropped to the floor. They weren’t moving. Were they dead?

“I-It’s— It’s sleeping gas!” Penny had yelped, pressing over her nose and mouth with her hands.

“There’s no point in trying to avoid it: it’s spreading too fast!” Stewie cursed.

“E-Everyone stay calm! Just stay calm!” Luka held out her trembling hands.

Rin whipped her head towards her. “L-Luka!”

At first, it was all just noise. Panic, mayhem, discord. But then it all fizzled out. Slowly, on their knees, lying down, unmoving: everyone was succumbing to the gas. Hajime had attempted to cover his airways himself, but he all too quickly felt the familiar nauseating wave of dizziness overcome his senses. He would've despised how similar it felt, if he didn't feel so tired right now. Dropping to his knees, weakly fighting back the urge to stop functioning completely, he looked towards his skeleton friend who was experiencing a similar heaviness.

"P-Papyrus…" Is all his croaky voice could muster before everything left him, coating his world into black.

"Hajime…! Papyrus…!"

"...Ngh…"

"Hajime!!"

Hajime's eyes shot open as he focused upon a quivering Rin, shaking his and Papyrus' senseless bodies. He felt the nerves arrive back in his arms as he unwaveringly steadied himself up into a sitting position. He noticed his hacking gun lying next to him. Had it fallen off his belt when he fell to the ground? Regardless, he quickly attached it back to his belt. At this point Papyrus had woken up himself, gazing over at Hajime and Rin with a dazed face.

"Huh…? What happened?"

Hajime grazed a hand against his forehead. "I… I don't…"

He shortly cut himself dry when he tilted his head towards the windows. They were bolted up. Completely bolted up. Full sheets of disgustingly drab and musty steel with large iron bolts for full effect. In fact, the hall was a lot more darker, with no gentle light to cascade through the open windows anymore; there was only a harsh, artificial glow that emitted from a large buzzing monitor on the…

Hang on. Monitor?

Hajime rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn't imagining things. But, no, the monitor, supposedly fixated to the far wall, was still present.

"What the hell…? Why does this—"

"Hey, what's going on? Why can't I see anythin'?!" And that's when Hajime realised the rest of the survivors had begun to wake up as well. Escargoon had begun to wave his balled fists about.

"And who replaced the windows? They look awfully tacky, darling…" Grooves commented with a twinge of concern in his voice.

"Who cares about the windows? What about that giant monitor over there?" Stewie pointed straight at the monitor. "Who the devil managed to fix that there?"

"I don't understand what's going on…" Taro's arms slowly curled around his torso.

"Hajime…?" Papyrus faltered after he and Hajime had helped each other onto their feet.

Hajime stared at him, trying to block out the grime changes to the church in his peripheral vision. "I…"

"Kehehe~!"

What was that? *Who* was that? And, why did that sound so familiar?

A click echoed throughout the hall, and the once buzzing white noise on the monitor screen was promptly replaced with a live footage of something smiling ear to ear, or well, petal to petal.

A flower.

“Kehehe! Kehehehehe! Wakey wakey my cute little dolls!” The flower tilted her head with an innocent smile that spiked daggers into Hajime’s throbbing head. This was the same girl that spoke on the intercom. “I’m Sunny Funny, the adorable leader of Despair Melody, and I welcome you to your new home! Oh, well, I guess this place was kinda already a home for you guys anyway… But now it’s a permanent home! Forever!” The flower raised her outstretched arms.

No one quite knew how to react to this phenomenon, even the more obscure creatures were itching for coherency.

“W-What? What’re you talking about, you shoddy looking puppet?!” Murdoc raised his voice at the screen.

Sunny deadpanned, then simply beamed. “Aha, that’s why I pity you pawns… But, did you know, when brought back to our origins, we’re all quite alike! We *all* share one special trait in common! Do you know what that is?”

“Just hurry it up already! What you’re saying doesn’t explain why the windows are like this!” Squidward complained.

“That’s right!” She blissfully ignored the protest. “We’re all motive video survivors! Or, at least that’s what you idiots call it. I like to think of it more as… friendly advice to our friends trapped in Miku’s incredible game!”

Hajime clenched his clammy fist. Sunny was also made to film a motive video too? That sounded unreal. Sunny’s eyelids drooped a little. “Oh, but, don’t get too cocky about that… despite our similarity, there’s a clear line that divides me from the rest of you! I’m like the 1% compared to you, the 99%! You see, what separates us is what we became of ourselves after our little run in with those motive videos.”

Hajime saw in the corner of his eye Rin cower behind Papyrus, who placed a firm hand on her shoulder.

“I mean, it’s a little obvious, hm? I’m up here… and you’re down there! Hehe! I’m so similar to Monokuma right now! Hehe! Like when he was on the monitors! Hehe!” Sunny giggled between her words as if what she was saying was supposed to be funny to everyone. No one laughed. Hajime felt a part of him shudder. He refrained from conceptualising what that meant.

Stewie stepped forward closer to the monitor. “So, what the hell are you trying to get at exactly? I’m assuming all of these goings on so far are your doing, correct?”

Sunny cheerfully nodded with a hum.

“Then why? Because honestly, darling, all that you’ve been saying hasn’t applied to us in the slightest.” Rarity denounced.

“Man, you guys are stupid! Like, really stupid!” Sunny stated with a blank face. “I’m so glad I’m not there being exposed to the radiation of your dumbasses!”

“Excuse me?!” Escargoon fumed.

“I think you’ve been saying more stupid things than we have.” Defoko stated, unamused. “Say something normal already.”

“But back to the topic at hand! Let me irritate the question you presented me: why are you all still here, in your crappy little church, instead of somewhere else? Well, that’s simple! The activity we’re going to be doing is actually quite perfect for a location like this! So, hey, maybe you guys aren’t *that* stupid after all!” Sunny explained.

The voice in Hajime’s head was screaming at him at this point. He tried desperately to ignore it, to ignore the horrors it was entailing, screeching into his ears to the point where they were practically ringing. *Red flag. Big red flag* .

“What activity…?” To Hajime’s surprise, it was Papyrus who asked that question. Hajime wanted to yell at him, curse at him, even slap him. His body shook with overwhelming adrenaline and he wanted this all to cease.

Sunny stared at them. “What activity, huh…?”

Then, her lips contorted into an arching grin so crooked with delight and malice that Hajime thought he was going to choke.

“You’re all going to partake in a killing game!”

Was it just him, or did Hajime’s vision suddenly blur?

“A *what* ?!” Grooves spat in bafflement.

“A killing game! You know, like the one all your friends went through!” Sunny chirped. “You’re going to be killing each other for a chance to escape the church! And it’s all going to be filmed live as a gift for Future Foundation to watch! I hope you remember how this works, because I’m not explaining this to a bunch of idiots!”

Hajime peered beside him. Papyrus and Rin were a mess about to spill: eyes locked in terror; visibly shaking in the darkened room; this was something Hajime deep down hoped they’d never have to experience.

“What in Neptune’s name are you talking about? Do you really think we’re gonna *kill* each other after all this?!” Squidward barked.

Taro stepped back. “K-Kill? We’re not gonna… W-What?”

“Hey! E-Everyone! We won’t do that! We won’t!” Penny assured frantically.

“We’re not going to play your pathetic excuse of a game.” Defoko blunty shot.

“Ah, but, you’re so right!” Sunny unexpectedly announced. Everyone skeptically glanced at her. “I mean, 13 participants? That’s such an ugly number! 13 *is* the unlucky number, after all! So, I’m going to be introducing another person before we begin! Hey, get him in here!” Sunny suddenly shouted, cupping her hands around her face for effect.

The front door rattled with a large force until it swung open and a small dog boy was shoved inside. He fell to the floor, scrambling to his knees to face the door before it was defiantly slammed in his face.

“Heyyy, Matt! Don’t be scared! Say hello to your new friends!” Sunny called out from the monitor like a mother trying to coax her child into playing with the kids at the park. Matt shakily turned his head to the group, who were now regarding him as he huddled closer to the door.

“S-Sunny… *Please* . Let me go I— I-I’ll do whatever you want but this— this isn’t what I—“

“But I have no use for a pathetic member like you, isn't that right? You just can’t be fixed, so this is the only thing you deserve, so you just need to suck it up and accept yourself as one of these pathetic idiots!” Sunny cut off his whimpers. “Okay? Good~!”

Matt looked as if his last strand of desperation snapped into two as the petrified lights in his eyes flickered out. He slumped against the door, unwilling to move another inch.

Hajime, Papyrus and Rin all looked at each other in dismay before their attention was brought back to the continuing objections being hurled from the group. Sunny giggled again, a lot longer than the other times, her voice almost hoarse from laughing so much. She was cackling, breath hitched on a hiccup or two but disregarded as she continued to laugh.

“Ohhh, I see. You think that killings won’t *never ever* happen in a million years even if you all starved to death or something!” She poked a finger to her cheek as she imitated a cutesy impression. “Well that doesn’t matter! Because frankly a murder has already occurred under your stupid noses!”

She paused. “Or, well, should I say… *above* .”

Hajime brows creased together. What was she saying? There couldn’t have been a murder because no one knew about the killing game, right? There couldn’t have been a murder because they were all asleep, right? There couldn’t have been a murder because they were all here, right?

Right?

That’s when a spot of blood grazed his left cheek.

He looked up.

…

…

…

Despair consumes a creature when they least expect it. Even if they have overcome the despair that threatened them in the past, it still comes back to bite them out of a sick spite to seek more. Despair makes them tremble, despair makes them weak.

And despair was the only thing Hajime could lament in his mind as he stared wide-eyed upon Luka Megurine crucifixed to the church's ceiling.

Dead.

Chapter End Notes

MILF SPOTTED DEAD I REPEAT MILF SPOTTED DE
AUGH I'M SO SORRY IF YOU LIKED HER I LOVED HER MAN *sobbing*
Any early predictions y'all? I'm all ears hehe,
(Also quick side note for anyone curious: I've headcanoned that they brought back AI Chiaki and now she lives on a little laptop that any of her friends can hold and talk to :-) hmm I wonder who talks to her the most lmao)
Also Matt wyd 👀

Chapter 5: Crucified by the Guilt

Chapter Notes

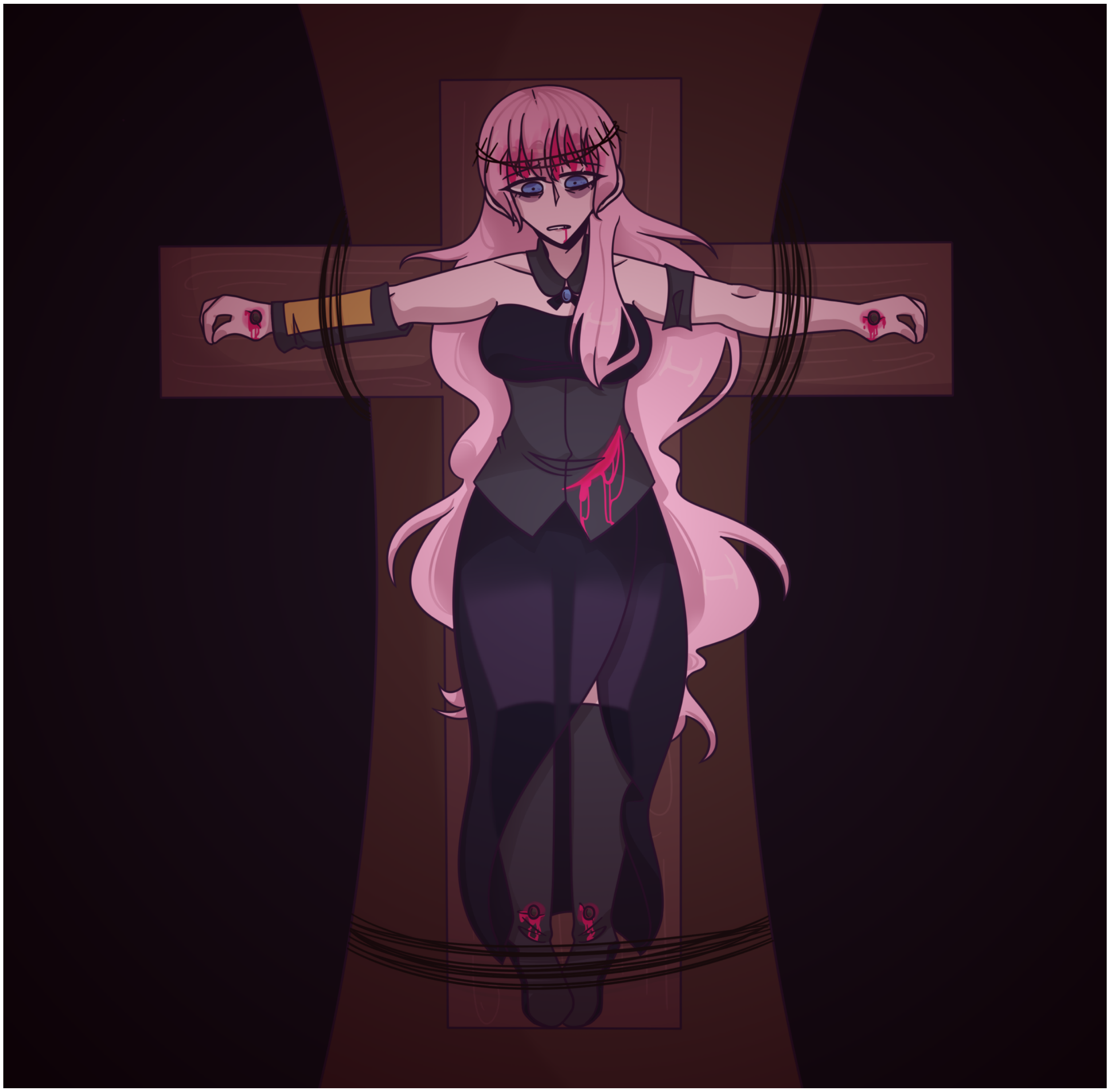
> So hey! Look at me! I'm posting faster again (I wonder how long that'll last lol)
> Ready to solve the milf murder? Hehe…
> Also a slight… gore warning, just typical DanganRonpa stuff, but telling you just to be safe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"L...Luka?"

All eyes were on the woman on the ceiling. Arms spread, legs straight, head hanging ever so slightly, the thorn crown tipping down over her forehead. Someone had called out to her, Hajime unsure who, as his ears felt scorched. In fact his whole body felt a tingling hot sensation crawl up his spine, running up and down and causing his figure to quiver ever so slightly.

Because, why would she even respond when she was dead?



“AAAHHH!” Hajime sensed a scream. It was feminine, but it wasn’t Rin. No, Rin was beside Papyrus still, and they were both fixated on Luka’s corpse like he once was.

“Get a hold of yourself, Penny!” Hajime finally realised it was Penny and Stewie who had broken the ghastly silence first.

“W-What the… what the hell? Who did this?!” Taro yelled, stepping back from the group with mildly flailing limbs.

“Who did this, hm?” Sunny perked up, placing a finger delicately on her chin. “Maybe it was, oh I dunno, one of you idiots? Ehehe~!”

“One of us…?” Grooves slowly began. “B-But, darling, I… no one here would…”

“To Luka…” Rarity attempted to finish.

“Well what a pity party! Because I know for a fact one of you did kill that broad, so you need to figure it out! C’mon, you guys are *way* slower than the 69th participants!” Sunny more than melodramatically pouted.

“And how the bloody hell are we s’posed to do any of that?!” Murdoc called out, hiding his own shaky voice under a barrage of curses.

“Investigate, stupid! Have you ever watched a detective show before? Do they have that where you’re from?” Sunny demanded. She then composed herself, taking one quick glance at Matt in the far corner before smiling once again. “Well, I’ll leave you to it then! I have cameras hidden around too so you better not slack off or try to escape! I’ll just skin you alive and cover your bare muscles with stickers!” She giggled before the monitor switched off with a click.

Hajime could only stand there. This was maddening. Surely this wasn’t real, was it? It was all just a dream and he was going to wake up in his room a few halls away and have breakfast with an alive and well Luka. And yet, he couldn’t bring his arm up to pinch himself. He couldn’t even turn his head to look at Papyrus or Rin anymore. Hell, he couldn’t even focus on whatever was ahead of his field of vision either.

If he had simply been told that he was going to suffer yet another death game, he would’ve held onto that ambient spark of hope that he could convince everyone not to take action. He knew he could’ve. But, upon seeing the corpse of a person he thought he could trust the most out of this group he was forced to join, that spark fizzled out like an empty, cold flame.

Such… despair, as a certain friend may call it.

Only then did Hajime’s legs begin to work again as he stumbled backwards out of the mayhem of the group he was too repressed into his mind to focus on. He didn’t even realise when he hit the wall, but he slid down to the floor regardless. He was going to collapse at any given point anyway; it might as well be here.

Just like on Jabberwock beach.

“Hajime…!” Suddenly Papyrus was in front of him, staring down with large, concerned eyes. He waved his hands over Hajime’s eyes, but Hajime was too tired to take his gaze off the floor. Papyrus kneeled down. “A-Are you okay? Please say something to me!”

Hajime parted his lips slightly, but his mouth was too dry to speak and his mind was too disoriented to think.

“What do we do now…?” Escargoon asked the group, hesitant.

“The little sunflower brat told us to investigate the murder but,” Squidward pointed up at Luka’s corpse. “How in Neptune are we supposed to investigate a body from up there?”

“T-There may be some way to take her down, I mean, if she’s okay with that…” Penny meekly suggested.

“‘She’? You mean Luka?” Stewie asked. “I’m afraid we can’t ask a dead woman for permission to toy with her body.”

“D-Don’t say it like that!”

“I don’t even think we need to investigate.” Defoko stepped forward. “We just have to find the killer.”

Squidward raised a brow. “And how do we do that without investigating?”

Defoko then turned and pointed towards Matt by the door. “Him.”

Matt jerked up. “Hwa… Wh-What…?”

“Hey, I remember now,” Murdoc began, “that flower said something about him being a member of her group or whatever.”

“Does that mean he’s working for her?” Rarity asked.

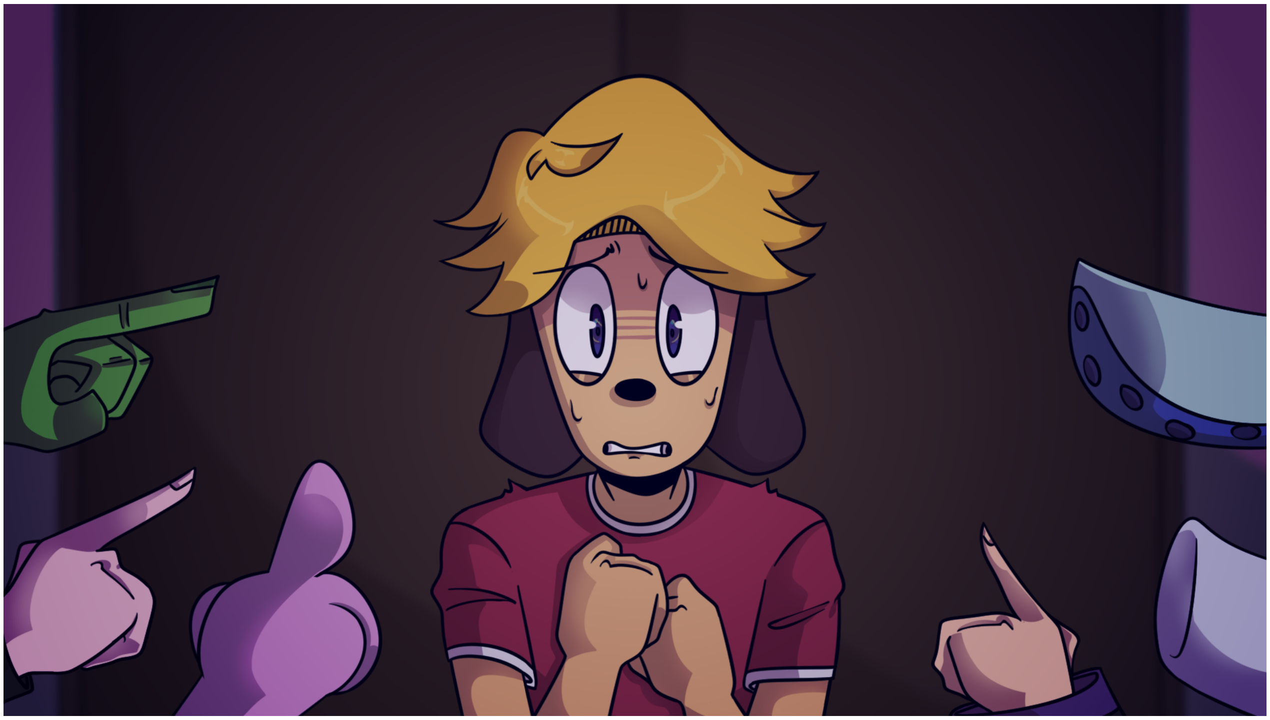
Matt jumped up. “W-Wait, I—“

“So it was YOU then!” Escargoon pointed a finger at him. “It all makes sense now! You were assigned to kill her, weren’t yer?!”

“What? I-I— I don’t know what you’re talking about! W-Who did I—“

“No one here would kill Luka.” Defoko stated. “And you’re the only person who has no connection to her.”

People’s voices started to uproar one over another over the accusation. They began to huddle towards Matt, who had nowhere to flee being backed up to the door. His breathing became shallower as he only managed to spurt out stutters in place of any coherent rebuttals.



“What’re they doing, Hajime?!” Papyrus called out. “Why’re they accusing that small dog boy? Surely they can’t say he’s the killer when he looks so shaken! R-Right, Hajime? ...Hajime?”

Hajime didn’t respond. It was as if his soul had left his body for another realm, and his shell of a person remained hollow and broken. Unmoving, almost unblinking. Quiet breaths and nothing else.

“Hajime!” Papyrus practically yelled at his face this time, grabbing his shoulders and shaking him with a little too much force. Again, nothing. Papyrus held back a choke of something glossy in his eyes as he turned behind him to notice Rin, who was looking at him and Hajime in joint fear. Papyrus sucked in a breath.

“Hey!” He cried out towards the group as he swiftly slid between them and Matt, stretching either arm out as if to protect him. “Why are you all accusing this dog boy? He doesn’t look like a killer, does he?!”

“It doesn’t matter if he ‘doesn’t look like a killer’.” Defoko shot back.

“Do you even have any evidence to prove otherwise?” Squidward raised a brow.

Papyrus faltered. “W-Well…”

“Do you think we can just easily trust someone from *that* group?” Stewie argued. “The same group who put us in this situation, remember?”

“W-Wait!” Rin ran towards Papyrus’ side. “But how could you say that he agrees with what the group’s doing when Sunny said they had ‘no use’ for him? It sounds like he was kicked out!”

“That could’ve simply been an act, dear.” Rarity pointed out. “For all we know he could still be following their orders.”

“H-Huh…?” Matt creased his brow in disgust over his fearful eyes.

Papyrus waved his arms about in an attempt to direct the group’s focus back onto him. “E-Everyone, please! Just give him a chance! We don’t know for sure that he is a—“

“He’s a traitor!” Escargoon fumed.

“A traitor?!” Grooves gasped.

The rest of the group began to sing in too, pointing and ravishing into their ‘traitor’ accusation. At this point Papyrus was at a standstill shouting at no one at this point: he might as well have been talking to a brick wall. His arms slumped down to his sides, but his shoulders were still hunched in concern for Matt, who was *trembling* .

“I-I’m not… I’m not a… a… t-trai—“

“ *That’s enough* .”

Steadily, the room came into silence. Papyrus, face drawing to a new blank over the familiar voice, turned to see the person who had finally managed to push themselves up from the floor and off the wall to in front of the entire group.

“Hajime…!” He gawked in delight.

“You’re all quick to make quite a big assumption on a person you’ve never met before.” Hajime began, clear and confident as if he had never had that breakdown in the first place. “I understand that. I do. Seeing someone out of place in a situation like this, of course you’d automatically assume they’re suspicious. It’s just human nature. Or, uh, a living creature’s nature.”

The non-human members of the group gave him a sharp look, but allowed him to continue on.

“Look, just… I know, probably better than all of you, because I’ve been in this exact same situation before. I’ve been in a killing game before.”

“Y-You have…?!” Rin exclaimed.

He nodded. “Yeah, and I survived too. So, I think I know what I’m talking about when I say that to even think negatively of a traitor is wrong.”

“What?! Why not?” Murdoc blurted.

“Because there was a traitor in my killing game too. And I was friends with that traitor, even after they outed themselves as so.”

“Huh? Why?” Taro asked.

“You see, that person had been nothing but kind and selfless to everyone throughout the despair we went through. Death after death, they swore they would protect everyone. Even as they took their last breath, they did just that.” Hajime lamented. “When the unfortunate time came where they told us their true role, we didn’t hate them… how could we? Hell, they *had* to reveal themselves to protect us. They didn’t have to, they could’ve kept quiet and stayed alive, but… So, what I’m trying to say is a traitor is neither inherently good nor bad… in fact, a traitor should be judged on how they act, not on their role alone.”

Hajime then turned to look at Matt, who was staring at him with wide eyes. “And I’m always willing to trust my hope on them.”

The group was quiet. No one dared to know how to respond. Hajime cleared his throat. And then, one voice spoke up.

“I… I agree with Hajime!” Penny raised her hand. “He sounds experienced in this! And I definitely trusted him before too!”

“Penny? Ah, what the hell… If what you said about being in a killing game yourself is true, then who am I to disagree?” Stewie admitted.

“Honestly, darling, I was finding it hard to imagine someone like him could be suspicious anyway.” Grooves added. “He just looks too innocent!”

Soon enough, the group had all come around, affirming that maybe Hajime had a point about all this.

“But what if he *really* is the killer?” Murdoc asked.

“Is that really such a smart question to ask after all this, you bottom-feeder?” Squidward berated.

“What?! I’m just sayin’, mate…”

“It’s also not a smart move to accuse people without a proper investigation, anyway.” Hajime replied. “So, we need to start looking for clues on Luka’s murder. The body, potential weapons, alibis… We need to search everywhere to find our answer. For Luka.”

“Yeah, we can’t forget this is for Luka!” Penny vowed.

“I care about Luka more than this, anyway…” Defoko muttered.

The group nodded. Then, everyone started to split up into small groups to look around the hall.

“Hajime,” Hajime heard Papyrus chorus beside him, making him turn to face him, “I’m so proud of you!”

“Huh? Proud of me for what?” Hajime raised a brow.

“Well, you know, because of…” Papyrus trailed off, pointing towards the wall where Hajime was once sitting. Upon seeing Hajime’s face flinch for a split second, Papyrus shook his head. “N-Nevermind!”

“Papyrus, don’t worry about me, I’m fine now…” Hajime assured. “We need to focus on investigating the murder now, anyway.”

“U-Um, excuse me…” Hajime turned back to see Matt next to him, wringing his wrists and trying to hold his gaze on his face rather than the floor. “I just wanted to say, um… Ah, I just want to thank you for, uh… T-Thank you for defending me! All three of you! I thank you!” Matt bowed sharply at the three.

“Eh?” Rin tilted her head, taken aback at the formal gesture.

“Hey, it’s no problem,” Hajime held out his hand as Matt leaned out of his bow. “You don’t need to thank us.”

“B-But I do! I didn’t know what I’d do if you guys didn’t convince them to stop accusing me… So, u-um, I’ve decided that I want to help you with your investigation, if that’s alright with you!” Matt insisted.

“Oh? Of course you can join us, small dog boy!” Papyrus placed his hands on his hips and smiled warmly.

“Um, Matt.” Matt meekly corrected. “My name, it’s Matt.”

“Oh, apologies! Hello, Matt! I’m Papyrus, and these are my friends Hajime and Rin!” Papyrus waved at him. Hajime shook his head with a small smirk: at this point he knew Papyrus really meant no harm.

“Hey, how’re we supposed to lower her body?” Hajime picked up someone say. He turned to see a few people gathered around a pillar with a rope tied around it with a considerable amount of loops.

“Hang on,” He called out as he sped-walked towards them, “I want to check out this first before we do anything.” They stepped away, and Hajime studied the pillar, slowly shifting his gaze up to where the rope led up to Luka and the crucifix.

“What’re you looking at, Hajime?” Papyrus was next to Hajime once again, Hajime noticing Rin and Matt had caught up to him too.

“Look: this rope, some ends have been tied to a few pillars in the main hall, and the other ends are tied to each end of the crucifix.” Hajime pointed to the different places he mentioned.

“If anything, um, the rope must be pretty sturdy to keep her in the air like that…” Matt spoke up.

"Are you done yet?" Squidward crossed his arms.

"Yeah, I think I'm done… There's no need to rush." Hajime condemned.

"You never know, there could be a time limit or something…" Rin suggested.

"Sunny never mentioned a time limit, but I guess you're right…" Hajime shrugged. He'd rather they have all the time in the world so he wouldn't have to see that flower ever again.

When Hajime gave them the nod, Squidward and Murdoc, along with Papyrus for added support, started to slowly untie the ropes to lower Luka's body to the ground. As she got closer to the ground, Hajime couldn't help but focus on her horrible expression as it came into clear: Luka was all void of the kindness and hope on her face that gleamed with it when she was alive.

Once lowered to the ground, he and his small group of three walked over to her body in the middle of the hall.

"Hm…" Hajime leant down onto one knee to get a better look. At this point in his life, he was used to doing this, despite how weird that might've sounded to others. Of course he wasn't perfectly okay with touching corpses, but he knew he had to get a closer look at them for potential clues. With no ultimate detective to guide him, sometimes he thought it was more efficient to do it himself.

The first thing Hajime noticed was the deep slash in Luka's side: it was a nasty gash, and it probably hurt a lot.

"Hey," Rin began, stepping over to Hajime, "is that what killed her…? That, um, cut?"

"I don't know…" Hajime admitted. "Maybe."

“A-Actually,” Matt pointed his index finger up, trying to attract their attention, “If you look closely, the bleeding on that particular wound is different to how it would bleed when a person is alive.”

“Oh? How do you know that?” Hajime questioned.

Matt looked away for a moment. “You see, I, um… I’ve done my research, heheh…”

Some people loitering around Luka’s body shot weird looks at Matt, but Hajime dismissed them with a scowl.

“Well, as a matter of fact I think you’re right.” Hajime stated, a little louder than usual just to make sure those people were listening. “Now that I look at it again, you’re definitely right, as I know a nurse who’s told me something similar along those lines.” Those people then turned away which Hajime couldn’t help but mentally smile smugly at.

As Hajime continued to scan around the body, Papyrus now felt it was his opportunity to speak up, attempting to lighten up the dark mood sifting around.

“I feel quite sorry for Luka. She had such long, beautiful hair that, well, not that I’ve ever had hair but, I was rather envious of.”

“Papyrus, that doesn’t really help… Wait.” Hajime paused.

“Huh? What is it?” Papyrus tried to follow his line of sight.

Talking about Luka’s hair made Hajime subconsciously look up at her head, which made him notice the blood seeping down from her forehead. He shuffled over, and attempted to gently lift her head up to check the underside.

"Ah, god…" He wanted to turn away. "There's blunt force trauma on the back of her head. It looks deep, that's for sure."

Papyrus gulped. "Oh dear…"

"If it's deep, then whatever caused it must've been blunt and large." Matt concluded.

"You mean the weapon, right?" Rin asked.

"Uh, yeah. W-Weapon. I meant that."

"So is there anything in the church that would resemble something like that?" Hajime inquired, resting Luka's head back down and retracting his hands away.

"Well, the kitchen is full of pots and pans… they're blunt and large, right?" Rin pondered to them.

"I guess we'll have to check out the kitchen, then." Hajime said, standing up and patting down his pant legs.

"Just a minute, Hajime, you lot," Stewie walked up to them with Penny, "I suspect you'd want to listen to the alibis we've collected before you continue on with your investigation."

"Huh? Why do we need alibis?" Papyrus asked. "Weren't we all asleep because of that gas?"

"Yes, but it's also to check what everyone was doing before we were all knocked out." Stewie explained. "And to see any anomalies with the reaction towards the gas."

“What he means is, um, if any of us here were immune to the gas.” Penny adjusted her glasses with a half smile.

“Oh, I see,” Matt hooked a finger around his chin, “it would be very easy to kill Luka with no witnesses that way… I-I mean, if that was the case, you know?”

“Well actually, it turns out everyone’s claimed that they were knocked out, so I’m not sure about that.” Penny revealed awkwardly.

“And even before that, they’ve all cited their attention was too focused on the locked door to do anything else.” Stewie added on.

Out of the corner of his eye Hajime noticed Rin’s face wash over with uneasiness as she huddled her hands close to her chest. It made him ponder for a moment.

“Huh. Well, thanks for telling us that.” Hajime then expressed his gratitude. “I’ll keep that in mind.” Penny and Stewie smiled as they went back to their own investigation.

“Alright, uh, let’s get back to what we were doing.”

“The kitchen, wasn’t it?” Papyrus prompted.

“Yeah. I’ve never been to the kitchen before, actually.”

“Me neither! As a prideful chef, I’m so ashamed of myself!” Papyrus scolded himself. Hajime shook his head as he and the others wandered to the kitchen. Rin led the way as she was the only one who had actually been inside before.

Once there, Hajime scanned the basic layout of the room. It was medium-sized and compact, with a counter that edged around the room complete with gaps in between for a stove and a fridge. Hajime wondered if the fridge was actually functioning, but shook it off as it wasn’t important here. Instead, he moved towards the sink, a glint from inside seizing his attention. Papyrus followed his tracks, Hajime only noticing because he had become accustomed to his overbearing presence beside his shoulder.

“Hey, there’s a frying pan in here!” Papyrus pointed into the sink where a steel pan was sitting, coaxed in a few water spots.

“And it seems to have been recently washed…” Hajime picked up.

“Did someone eat recently?” Papyrus titled his head. Hajime turned to him with a look that screamed ‘are you kidding me.’ “I’m only joking, Hajime! I just wanted to, um, lighten you up!”

“I don’t need to be ‘lightened up’.” Hajime exasperated. “We just need to focus, okay?”

“My apologies…” Papyrus gazed off to the side. Hajime sighed. If anything, he knew Papyrus was still worried about his whole breakdown a while ago. He appreciated it, but it was something he just wanted to drop entirely.

“Oh! Actually…” Papyrus turned to the sink and turned on the tap. Hajime watched on in confusion and he ran his gloved finger under the gushing water. And then he suddenly felt the freezing sensation as Papyrus swiped said finger across his cheek.

“H-Hey! What the hell was that for?” Hajime shot.

“Don’t fret! I was simply washing off that blood stain on your cheek!” Papyrus quickly defended.

“Oh,” Hajime had to admit he had forgotten about that smear by now, “uh, thanks.”

“Hey, guys,” Matt called from the other side of the kitchen. Hajime and Papyrus both turned to see him standing beside a rack of knives. “I just wanted to let you know that none of the knives have been stolen, or tampered with for that matter. This confirms that they weren’t used to cause that gash in Luka’s side, which I assumed anyway, since there’s no way a knife could make such a wound unless you were to modify it and…” Matt stopped in his train of thought to see the two staring at him blankly. “Ahaha! U-Um, don’t worry! I was just stating my ideas! Uh… yeah…” Matt scratched the back of his neck, embarrassed.

“Nothing wrong with that!” Papyrus obliviously reassured.

“Yeah, how about you Rin? You said you’ve been in the kitchen before, so maybe you know a bit more than we do.” Hajime shifted his eyes over to Rin, who was surprisingly still standing at the doorway, shuffling on her feet.

“H-Huh? Um, yeah… nothing’s changed from what I’ve seen…” Rin quickly muttered, avoiding her sight from Hajime completely.

After one final look-over, the four stepped out back into the main hall. So far, Hajime had begun to lay out the foundations of this case in his mind, attempting to keep his thoughts orderly through past experience. As he noticed Papyrus and Rin engage in a small talk, and Matt deep in his own ideas, he allowed himself to get immersed with his mental truth bullets.

“Darling!” Hajime closed off his current thought as he saw Grooves and Rarity tread towards him.

“Huh? What is it?” He asked.

“I believe we’ve found something rather suspicious on Luka’s person.” Rarity informed.

“We’re not really experts, but seeing you stride your way around makes us think you know a thing or two about this detective business.” Grooves addressed.

“Well I’m not a professional by any standards, you know… But, I’ll take a look if you say it’s important.” Hajime sheepishly accepted.

Hajime allowed Grooves and Rarity to lead him back to Luka’s body, where they gestured up to her head.

“It’s behind her head, dear.” Rarity briefly pointed with her hoove. Hajime crossed his arms: hadn’t he already checked her head? Nevertheless, he knelt down to check underneath her head again, and his eyes widened.

“What is this…? Is this a… spear?” He observed the weapon resting behind Luka’s frame.

“It was pretty hard to notice, so I don’t blame you.” Grooves began. “I have no idea why it’s there, however. Perhaps it was to keep her upright?”

“Like a doll?” Hajime questioned aloud.

“…There’s also blood on the tip. Of course, I’m not entirely certain if it’s simply dripped down from her head wound or not.” Rarity spoke up again.

Hajime stood up. “And were there any spears in the church originally?”

“Now that you mention it, darling, I did happen to stumble across this elegant display of religious weaponry this one time…” Grooves recalled.

“Could you show me it?” And with that, they lead him towards one of the far corners of the hall. There, he studied the multitude of spears hung on the wall, their colour dull and bleak. If only light was able to reach them, they’d appear a lot more approachable and appreciable, Hajime thought.

“I guess that missing spear there must be the one behind Luka…” Hajime noted, pointing to the gap between two spears.

When Hajime walked back to his group, he caught sight of how many of the others were echoing the same face of fatigue.

“What are we even supposed to look at now? I’ve looked at just about everything suspicious!” Escargoon complained.

“Maybe it’s time to look at every *one* suspicious.” Defoko decided.

“Yeah! Finally!” Murdoc acclaimed. “So, uh, who d’yer think done it?”

“Are we sure it was one of us?” Taro asked, tugging at his unform’s collar.

“Are you implying you still think it’s the dog?” Stewie asked.

“W-Well, I’m just saying…”

Some people turned to spy at Matt, who jolted at the intrusion.

“Hey!” Papyrus stepped in front of Matt. “Actually, Hajime is ready to convict the *real* killer, isn’t that right, partner?”

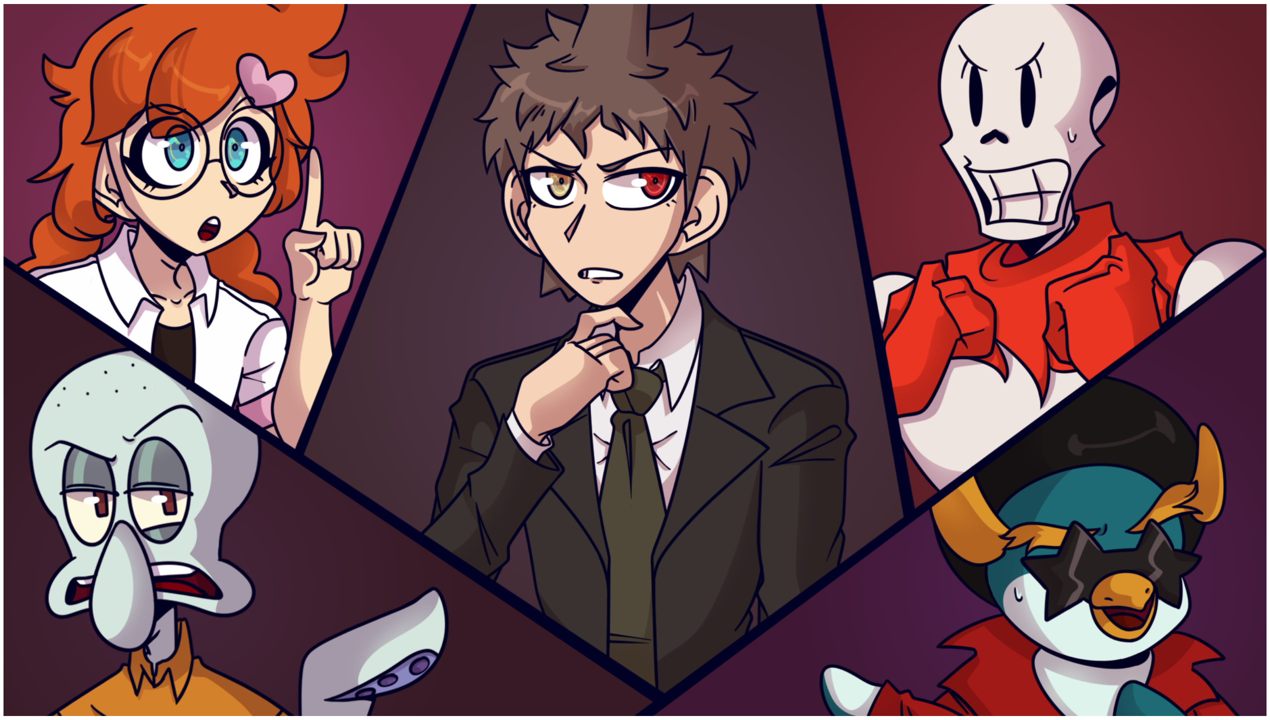
“Huh?” Hajime whipped his head to him, startled out of his mental suspicions. Papyrus gave him a slanted smile that was lacking his usual confidence. He was just as lost here, wasn’t he?

Hajime cleared his throat. “U-Um, well, I guess we could start discussing the case? *Even though I’m not entirely ready myself* .” Hajime gritted the last sentence though his teeth to

Papyrus, who looked away in penitence.

Everyone gathered around in a small circle to conduct the debate. Hajime had to admit how claustrophobic it was compared to the open trial room he had known to argue in, but regardless he knew this had to make do. Recollecting his notions on all the evidence gathered this far, he took a deep breath.

Luka was a selfless woman who had her heart set on supporting the ones around her. Her death was all too tragic, and Hajime could tell how hard hit some of her admirers had become over it. For Luka, he had said, and for Luka it will be.



“So, where do we begin?” Penny broke the silence. “Seeing there’s a lot to cover and everything.”

“There is?” Murdoc raised a brow idly.

“Uh, let’s just start with the cause of death, huh?” Hajime proposed. “We can tell that Luka was hit on the back of the head, and therefore died of blunt force trauma.”

“Hey, what?! How about that big ol’ gash in the side of her, eh?” Escargoon argued. “With a cut that big she had to have bled out!”

“How gruesome… Even if I’ve seen that before in the Conductor’s scripts, mind you…” Grooves prattled.

“Actually, that wound was made after her murder.” Hajime corrected.

“The way it bled makes it clear that was the case.” Matt pointed out in agreement.

“I suppose that spear we found behind her was used to make that gash, hm?” Rarity suggested. “It must’ve been hidden behind her to obstruct its purpose.”

“So what was the real murder weapon?” Taro questioned.

“It was probably the frying pan we found in the kitchen.” Hajime replied.

“It was washed recently, so perhaps that means…” Papyrus faltered. “Ah, what does that mean again…”

“That it isn’t too far off to say that the killer washed off the blood from the pan.” Stewie finished his line of thought.

Papyrus snapped his fingers. “Ah yes! That was it! Thank you, small human! Um, I mean, Stewie!”

“But, a frying pan, darling? Really? I suppose you could knock her out, but that’s much too light to kill someone in one hit.” Rarity condemned.

“Actually you can, heheh… You see, one time me mate 2D n’ Russel where having a lil’ friendly chat and oh, heheh, you should’ve seen what he did with the frying pan.” Murdoc rambled, snickering in between his incoherent retelling.

“Is that supposed to confirm it’s possible?” Penny tilted her head in puzzlement.

“…Maybe she was just hit multiple times.” Rin quietly spoke. Hajime glanced at her for a few beats, then nodded as he looked back to the group.

“Yeah, that’s what I was thinking too.” He concluded.

“So what about the whole ‘religious aesthetic’ with the murder?” Grooves asked.

“That had to have been done after the murder.” Hajime explained. “Remember how that rope was tied to the crucifix and some of the pillars? The killer must’ve done something to fix Luka to the ceiling.”

“Then how? It seems kind of impossible to me.” Taro commented.

Hajime paused for a moment to think to himself. If Sunny was telling the truth about the killer being one of them, and she or whoever else under Despair Melody didn’t medle with the case, then it’d have to be doable. Clearing his mind, he went into a logic dive.

“Uh, Hajime,” Hajime was snapped back to reality rather quickly as he turned to Papyrus who was whispering to him, “aren’t you going to answer?”

“I am, I just need time to think, okay?”

“Oh, it looked like to me like you were… playing around in your mind, of sorts. Perhaps even riding on a board.” Papyrus noted. Hajime deadpanned.

The group murmured small-talk as Hajime went back to his dive. Finally realising the solution, he spoke up, gathering their attention.

“I see.” He began. “The ropes were first tied to each end of Luka’s crucifix and thrown over the clerestory arches on the ceiling. Then, the killer pulled on the ropes to lift Luka up to the ceiling, and tied the remaining ends of the rope to the pillars.”

“Oh, that’s smart!” Rin gasped.

“Smart… if we assume the killer has super strength.” Stewie pointed out. “Are we really going to assume any of us here could lift up an adult woman and a crucifix just with some rope alone?”

“Maybe the killer didn’t do it alone.” Defoko theorised. “Maybe they got help from someone.”

“Like an accomplice? Are yer really sayin’ two of us did this?!” Escargoon accused.

Defoko shook her head. “No. I’m talking about Despair Melody. The killer could’ve teamed up with them to gain extra hands.”

“That could be the case…” Hajime crossed his arms over his chest.

“I’m afraid to bring this up again, darling, but isn’t the most obvious person here capable of that the Despair Melody member?” Rarity gestures towards Matt.

“Oh, so it was the little bastard!” Murdoc sneered.

Matt jumped. “H-Huh?!”

“ *Don’t* call him that.” Hajime shot.

“I suppose this is my fault we’ve gone back to the blame game so quickly,” Stewie apologised, “but what we’re all really forgetting here in this discussion thus far is the time frame of the murder.”

“Ah, yeah. We need to figure out when exactly Luka was killed.” Penny added on.

“D’you mean she was killed when we woke up?” Murdoc asked, putting a hand on his head.

“No, you idiot. Obviously the murder took place while we were asleep.” Squidward belittled.

“But the only person not here not asleep during that time was the little darling…” Grooves pointed towards Matt with a hint of guilt.

“Hang on, there may be another possibility here we’re missing.” Hajime cut in. Then, he finally turned to Rin with the conviction he had in his mind for a while. “Rin, you were awake before me and Papyrus, weren’t you?”

“Um, y-yeah…” Rin nodded.

“And when we were told about the alibis, you became oddly quiet.” Hajime continued his interrogation.

“T-That…”

“Rin? What’s wrong?” Papyrus questioned, holding a hand out to her.

“Is there something you know that we don’t?” Hajime put the question forward.

“I… I was… Iwasneverknockedoutbythesleepinggasokay?!” Rin exclaimed, shutting her eyes tightly to avoid Hajime’s gaze.

“What? Girl, slow down! Your words are mumbo-jumbo at 50 miles an hour!” Escargoon snapped.

“You weren’t affected by the gas?” Hajime’s eyes widened. He didn’t expect that. “How come?”

Rin slowly opened her eyes, and relaxed her shoulders a bit. “Well, um, you see… vocaloids, like me and Luka, aren’t exactly affected the same way by certain chemicals cuz of how we’re built, or at least that’s what I’ve been told by the other loids before.”

“Well why didn’t you say anything before?” Stewie inquired.

“I-I’m sorry! I just thought—“

“Wait. If you said that you and Luka weren’t affected by the gas, doesn’t that mean you could’ve attacked her yourself?” Taro brought forward.

“So it was *her* ?” Squidward rasped.

“I-It wasn’t me! Why would I kill Luka?!” Rin shook her head frantically.

Papyrus swiftly stepped in front of Rin. “Don’t accuse her now! And anyway, there’s no possible way she could have gotten the jump on Luka!”

“That is true… unless Luka was weakened somehow.” Matt insighted. Papyrus and Rin looked at him. “I mean— I-I was just stating my ideas, you know!”

“Ah, hang on…” Hajime realised aloud. “That reminds me: Papyrus, you said that Luka had a repulsion to my hacking gun, didn’t you?”

“Indeed! As well as her throwing out that box of electronics and causing Penny and Stewie to pack up their invention!” Papyrus pointed his index finger up in the air.

“Hang on, what’s this got to do with anything?” Squidward raised a sharp brow.

“Just… I didn’t think about it too much before, but I did notice how Luka reacted to my hacking gun when we came back from our scavenge today…” Hajime tried to recall, before turning to the aforementioned kids. “And, Penny and Stewie, is that true? Did you really clear away your invention when Luka was around?”

“Yeah,” Penny confessed, “anytime she’s near something electronic she starts to look kinda ill… I have no idea why, though.”

“I see…” Hajime then pointed his finger towards the group. “Then I propose that Luka had a certain repulsion towards electronic devices, more specifically, the electromagnetic waves!”

“Huh? What? What is this, a certain lawyer’s brother who covers himself in foil everytime he wanders outside?” Stewie scoffed. “…Then again, you do make a convincing point.”

“How? What he just says doesn’t make any sense.” Defoko suddenly interjected. “No vocaloids or utaus have that condition. And why would we? We’re singers: we deal with electronics all the time.”

“Unless Luka perfected acoustic…” Grooves pondered.

“That’s not the point.” Defoko sighed.

“Actually,” Rin spoke up, “I think I remember Miku mentioning something about doing ‘experiments’ on some of her friends… and she always hated how bad Luka was with electronics…”

“So she cursed Luka?!” Escargoon shrieked.

“I guess you could call it a ‘quirk’. Well, it’s not like I watched that anime, anyway…” Rin quietly rambled on.

“And where did this come from? Why didn’t you mention anything like this earlier if it was so important?” Defoko glared at her.

“Well, I just kinda remembered it now cuz it’s being mentioned…”

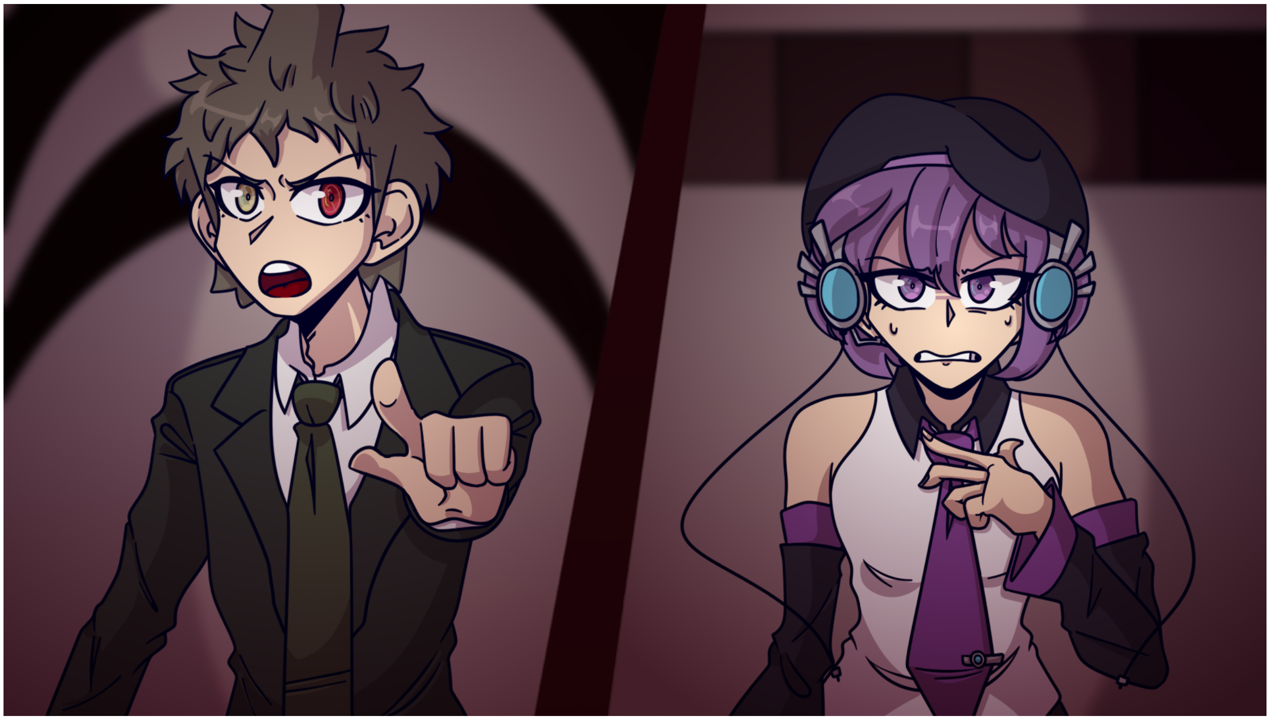
“How about you just shut your mouth with your lies, just because you think people will believe you as you appeared so close to Luka?”

Rin stepped back slightly. “H-Huh?

“Hey, Defoko… Are you afraid of something?” Hajime intercepted, shooting her a stern look. Everyone looked towards Defoko, a mixture of skepticism and dubiety obvious on their faces.

Defoko noticed them, and fixed her gaze on Hajime to ignore them. “What? No…?”

“Oh? Because I think you’re lashing out because your crime is slowly being exposed… Defoko, I believe you may be the killer.” Hajime pointed straight at her.



“W-What? What’re you talking about? Are you saying I killed Luka? Really?” Defoko badgered. “Luka? The only person who ever cared for me after all this, this *shit* that happened to the world? After one of my best friends died and I had no say over it? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Defoko…” Rarity consoled.

“But, you must’ve been awake with Luka and Rin after the sleeping gas attack,” Hajime countered, “as you yourself admitted that vocaloids and utaus are alike.”

“Gh!” Defoko grunted. “And? It’s the same argument the skeleton said here: how could I get the jump on Luka? And don’t mention that ‘electromagnetic repulsion’ B.S. because that means nothing on its own.”

“You’re right: it doesn’t mean anything on its own. However…” Hajime reached for his belt and retrieved his hacking gun. “I noticed when I woke up, my hacking gun was off my belt. At first, I assumed it had simply fallen off, but now that I think about it…”

“Are you implying that she stole it, Hajime?” Papyrus asked.

Hajime nodded. “Yeah. And with that, Defoko could’ve used it’s electromagnetic bullets to stun Luka into vulnerability.”

“So she shot Luka?! Why didn’t she bloody die from that?” Murdoc exasperated.

“It’s not a real gun.” Hajime irritatedly corrected. “It shoots bullets specifically designed to counter a Monokuma’s programming only.”

“Oh, that’s quite an interesting weapon, actually…” Matt noted.

“So what if that gun could ‘stun’ Luka or whatever, that doesn’t mean I’m the killer! There’s no evidence that specifically incriminates me!” Defoko spat back.

“I’m afraid to say it, but she’s right.” Penny sulked. “All of the evidence we have could actually point to anyone.”

“N-No…”

“No?” Hajime glanced over at Rin, who had stepped forward with a glint of fire in her eyes.

“Because I… I saw the whole thing!”

A few people gasped.

“Y-You did?” Taro sputtered.

“Ah, yeah! Of course she did!” Matt eurekard. “If Luka, Defoko *and* Rin weren’t affected by the gas, then Rin obviously would’ve saw the whole murder go down!”

“Rin, you… you saw Luka die?” Papyrus faltered.

Rin sucked in a breath, briefly swiping away a tear in her eye. “I-I did… but I was too scared to do anything… I thought I was going to die too if I tried to stop her, so I hid. Defoko must’ve forgotten about me…” Hajime felt his heart strain slightly at the retelling; Rin was trying with all her might not to break down. He should’ve been more suspicious about it: Rin hardly reacted to the initial body discovery, hadn’t she?

“All you’re planning, just to be caught by a witness, huh?” Stewie rebutted.

“What? What the hell are you talking about?!” Defoko shot.

“We’re saying you’re the killer!” Squidward pointed towards her.

“Huh? Is it true? Did Defoko really kill Luka?” Rarity cautioned. Defoko pursed her lips, refusing to answer.

“Defoko, please, just give it up already. I’m not trusting Rin because she was closest to Luka, I’m trusting her because I know she wouldn’t lie to us.” Hajime affirmed.

All eyes were on Defoko. The room was silent, save from a few sharp breaths and barely comprehensible murmurs from the few unconvinced members.

“Defo—“

“SO WHAT?!” Defoko suddenly exploded. “Yeah, I killed Luka! So what? Are you going to cry? Panic? Run around like a goddamn headless chicken because your precious leader is gone?!”

“Huh?!” Grooves put his flippers up in defense.

“This whole ‘survivor base’ was a bunch of lies from the beginning! The fake sense of ‘hope’ around here was pissing me off! Just because Luka promised you’d all go home safely to your poor little families, doesn’t mean it’s true! Hell, it won’t be! It won’t ever be! We’re *fucked* !” Defoko growled. Hajime couldn’t believe what he was hearing: for someone so originally soft-spoken and introverted like her, Defoko was displaying her true colours so insanely sincerely. He always had a slight speculation ever since she had thrown that knife into the monitor, but this was far too left field from what he expected.

“But why? Why did you kill Luka?” Papyrus questioned, uneasy.

“You want to know why? Ha! Can't you see it right now? You’re all useless without her! Without her guide, her meals, her support, you’re all as good as dead. It’s like a guy in his 30s still living with his mother and expecting her to make his meals and clean his clothes — it’s pathetic! Lowlife scum! And we’re supposed to be survivors? I don’t see any surviving here!” Defoko scoffed. Then, she looked towards the floor. “Miku ruined everything we ever had, and there’s nothing we can do about it, even if she’s dead. That’s how powerful she is. No amount of good-will, hope, or optimism is ever going to solve that.”

“But what was the whole thing with crucifying her onto the goddamn ceiling?” Stewie asked.

Defoko crossed her arms. “We’re in a church: ironic, isn’t it? You all practically worshipped her, so why not make her look the part? I even thought something as obvious as that would open your eyes, but I guess not…”

“And that’s why you killed Luka? To make some sick jab at us?” Squidward retaliated.

“With her gone, maybe you’d all finally understand what survival actually means in this world. But I guess you’ve been so babied that it’s impossible.”

“Defoko… I understand what you’re trying to say. To live through what feels like the end of the world, it’s going to feel difficult. But, this is not how you should deal with it. To be clouded so negatively to the point where you think murder is the only way you’ll get through to people is not how you move forward in life.” Hajime scolded.

“I loved Luka, but I certainly never thought I depended on her!” Grooves added. “In fact, her hope is what inspired my own hope!”

“Perhaps you’ve thought about this all wrong. Luka wasn’t a walking stick, per say, but a ladder leading us to the top!” Papyrus attested.

“What’s with all these analogies?” Matt questioned. “Also, that one makes no sense: a walking stick is for people with difficulty walking, it’s out of their control that they’re dependent on it. If anything, you could’ve made the comparison between an escalator and stairs.”

“Oh, u-um, is that so?” Papyrus rubbed the back of his neck.

“Would you all just shut up already?!” Defoko seethed.

“Shut up? But, I think they’ve come to a conclusion on who the killer is, hehe~!”

Hajime froze. He and the others glanced over to the monitor to see Sunny beaming down at them. Her smile was disgusting, a reminder that as long as she was up there, she was in total control.

“Well, am I right?” Sunny’s smile shrunk down. “You all agree that Defoko is the killer, yes?”

“I mean she literally admitted she was the killer…” Murdoc shrugged. The others eventually nodded in agreement.

“Teehee~ And you’re correct! The dirty bastard blackened that killed Luka was none other than dirty bastard Defoko!” Sunny cheered.

Hajime shot a quick slide glance at Defoko, who wasn’t even looking at the monitor.

“I suppose you could say we had a little agreement between the two of us: I allowed Defoko to kill Luka however she liked, and I gave her some helping hands with whatever she needed!” Sunny explained with peppiness. “Sigh… and she tried so hard to pin it onto Matt. I wish it was him too, you know…” Hajime didn’t know why, but he was becoming seriously irritated by all these unnecessary jabs at Matt.

“Well, anyway!” Sunny jumped up. “It’s time for the moment I’ve been waiting for!”

“Huh? What time?” Penny questioned.

“The execution, you idiots!”

“ *What...* ?” Defoko finally whipped her head up to the screen. “What do you… What are you… What…?”

“Can you not hear me right? I said execution! You’re going to die~!” Sunny raised her arms high above her head.

“I— I don’t deserve to die!” Defoko shrilled. “The whole reason I did this was to warn them! If anything, you should kill them! Not me! They’ll learn nothing otherwise!”

“Huuh? But, we all know how this game works, right? Rule seven: if the blackened is exposed during the class trial, they alone will receive punishment!” Sunny recited. “Oh, but you just want to live because of how selfish you are, isn’t that right? Even after Luka allowed you to kill her?”

“She did what…?” Matt just audibly spoke.

“Oh, I have the footage of the whole thing! Do you guys want to see it? It’ll let selfish Defoko live just a tinsy bit longer so why not!”

At once, the monitor transitioned from Sunny to static, and then to blurry footage of a hidden camera focused on two figures: Defoko and Luka. Defoko had just shot Luka with the hacking gun, standing over her figure huddled on the floor and holding herself in pain.

“A-Ah… Please, it hurts so much…” Luka sobbed through her teeth. “I feel so… dizzy. W-What happened?”

Defoko then left for a moment and returned with the frying pan gripped in both hands.

“D-Defoko…?” Luka shot one eye open. “What’re you doing with that…?”

“I’m sorry, Luka.” Defoko stoically apologised with a blank face. “But the only way I’ll get through to them is without you here.”

“What…? Without me? Defoko, n-no…” Luka tried to shake her head against her throbbing headache. “No, don’t, don’t do this…”

“Don’t think I want to do this, either…” Defoko lifted the pan behind her head.

“Then don’t… just don’t do it, Defoko. We can work this out, we can— ah…” Luka reached for her head, soothing it.

“But…”

“No one is forcing you to do this… Is it because you want to leave? Is it because you don’t like it here? Have I done something wrong?” Luka tried to turn to face her. “If I have, please let me know. I-I’ve tried my hardest to help everyone, even our new members. But Defoko, you’ve always been so quiet, and I just want to know what’s going on in your head…”

“No one has ever understood, so don’t bother…”

“But, Defoko, I want to. This situation is killing me like it is with everyone else. I know I’ve looked confident, but to be honest…” Luka dryly chuckled. “I’m absolutely terrified. Does that help you? Does that ease your pain?”

Defoko stood silent, dropping the pan a little. “Then why didn’t you tell the others?”

“Because… Because they need a role model. They needed someone to look strong and tell them they can be strong too.” Luka smiled.

“…That was a dumb move.”

“Perhaps it was, wasn’t it? However, I don’t see it that way.” Luka simply shrugged. “Hey, are you still going to kill me?”

Defoko didn’t answer, prompting Luka to continue.

“…I see. Just, please don’t hurt the others. Please, don’t hurt Rin. She hasn’t done anything wrong. And her friends, too. They aren’t the reason you feel this way, remember that.”

Defoko soaked in her words momentarily. Then, she raised the pan again. “I’ve made up my mind.”

Luka turned back around. “And so have I.”

WHAM .

The footage cut off.

Hajime couldn't help the inescapable wave of guilt poor over him. Here he had gotten the slightest idea that Luka was in any way suspicious, but what she said told the group held true: to her last dying breath, she would be selfless and kind, despite her overarching terror. He just wanted to slap himself for not taking her words to heart.

"Oh dear, what a sappy ending!" Sunny exclaimed as she popped back up into frame. "Ah, but Miku loved that sorta stuff, didn't she? To be honest, I'm a fan too! That's why I love that this killing game's already in full swing! Especially with the upcoming execution!"

"Why did you show that? Why did you show that to them? You don't have to do this! Just let me go and I won't speak a word of this to anyone!" Defoko attempted to plead.

"Ahem, unfortunately we won't be having a big ol' fancy execution like you've seen before, but we will be going back to an old favourite Miku really loved but never got to use!" Sunny announced, ignoring Defoko.

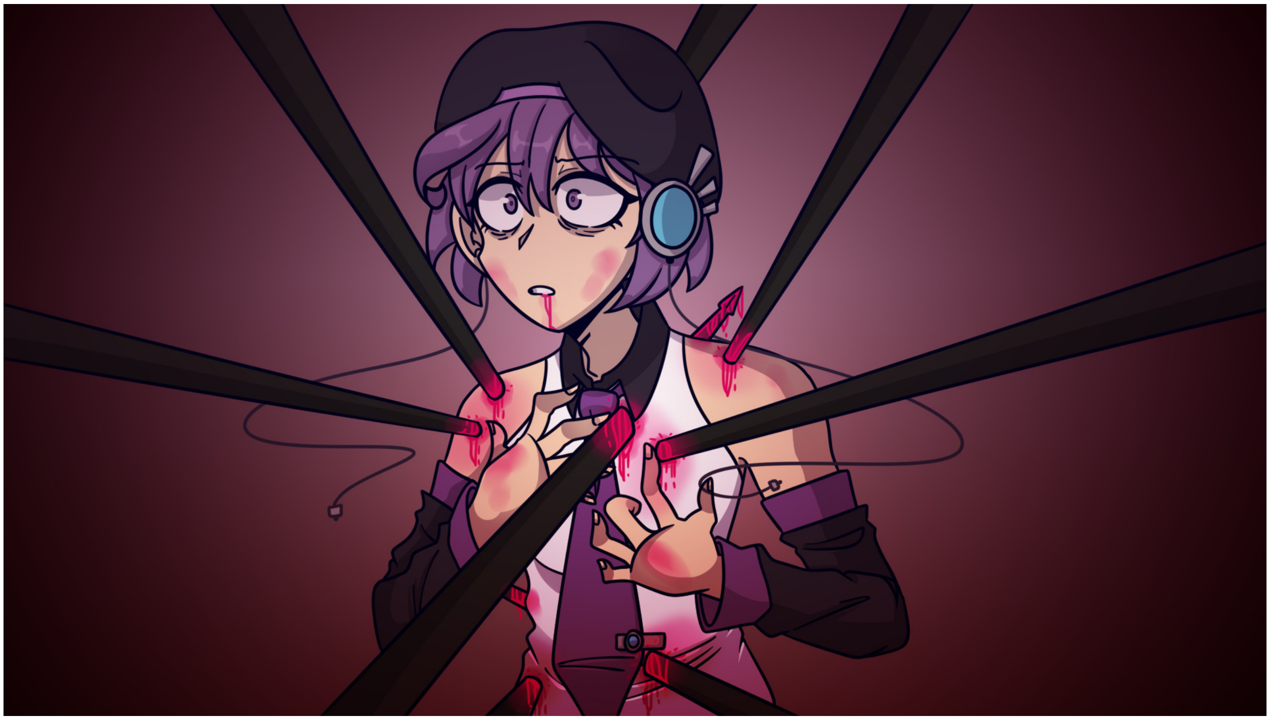
"W-Wait—"

"Well then, let's give it everything we've got! It's punishment time!"

"STOP—"

KSH .

Like a strike of a million or so bullets, long, javelin-like spears bursted out from all different sides of the main hall's walls, piercing into Defoko's defenceless body. Pink exploded out of the clean holes it ripped into her, gushing out in spurs like a broken fountain.



"Gh… Gh… Ah…" Defoko wailed softly. Her arms were twitching, the muscles in her fingers contracting sporadically. "N-No… I didn't… want to… no…"

Her pupils were as wide as pin pricks, focusing on nothing as the colour from them drained to a delirious grey.

"I didn't… w-want this…"

All at once, Defoko's body collapsed to the floor, her blood pooling around her as it continued to spill out of her lifeless person.

Shrieks and screams echoed wildly around the open hall as the sinking fear of what just happened installed within the group. Rin clasped her hands around her mouth as she held back horrified chokes, Matt shut his eyes and trembled, Papyrus bit his thumb trying to remain still and silent. Hajime was no different: he knew all too well about the 'spears of gungnir', but to see them in action made his stomach drop. He felt tired again. Too tired for all this.

“Ahahahaha! Again, again!” Sunny hollered and clapped as her large smile stretched across her nauseatingly bright yellow face. “Oh, I’m so excited to see this happen all over again! I wonder who’ll die next—“

“ *Boooooring* !”

“Huh?” Sunny’s face immediately shifted into disgust at the entirely new voice. Hajime was caught off guard more by her expression than the voice.

“That fuckin’ case, lols! Utterly boring! I mean, who kills off the milf and expects anyone after that more impactful? Psh, not me, that’s for sure!” The voice rattled on.

“What’re you talking about?” Sunny spat through gritted teeth, trying to maintain a smile for the group. “We talked about this, this is exactly what I wanted to happen—“

“Okay, but, uh, I don’t. Ha. So let’s change shit up, huh? I have a much better idea.”

As soon as they said that, a delirious beeping noise rang out through the hall, bouncing off the walls and invading Hajime’s mind.

“Huh? What’s going on? What did you do?” Sunny interrogated, her cool façade fading off.

The voice snickered. “I took it upon myself to lace that shithole with explosives, y’know, just for funsies! But hey! Now I can use ‘em, so I see this as a win! A killing game where everyone dies is much cooler, don’t you think?”

Sunny thought for a moment, and her smile creeped back all too soon. “ *Oh, I see* . Yes, this is… an interesting twist! I didn't see it coming, either! How long until they go off?”

“Eh, three minutes, give or take. I dunno, lols.”

“Alrighty then!” Sunny grabbed a keyboard and typed something off screen. “You poor idiots have three minutes until the explosives go boom~! Good luck, and have a wonderful trip to hell!” With that, Sunny waved and the screen switched to a timer already at 2:30 minutes and counting down ever so painfully.

“W-W-What?! We’re gonna explode?!” Escargoon yelped.

“We need to get out of here!” Taro cried. “Let’s try the door again!”

“This is way too much for me to handle in one day, darling!” Rarity complained, but dashed over to the door with some others regardless.

Hajime and the others stood still, unsure on what to do. He was pressed to find out who the hell that voice was, but what was more important was finding a way out before they’d all get blown to smithereens.

“Does anyone have any idea on how to get out of here?” He frantically asked to no one in particular upon seeing the others failing to get the door to budge.

“U-Um! I may have an idea!” Matt declared. “There should be an underground tunnel underneath the church that leads to the outside! Despair Melody doesn’t know about it, so it shouldn’t be blocked off!”

“Eh? How do you know that?” Rin questioned.

“I just, w-well—“

“We have no time for these questions!” Papyrus shouted. “Matt, where is this tunnel you speak of?”

“Ah, um, I don’t know myself. B-But I’m telling the truth, it has to be around here somewhere!” Matt attested.

“Hey! I think I know what you’re talking about!” Penny came running up to them along with Stewie. “We came across a trap door in the storage room before and we saw it lead somewhere underground!”

“Then let’s go!” Hajime ushered as they tagged along with Penny and Stewie to the storage room. A few pairs of hands fumbled with the trap door until they busted it open.

“Alright, you two first!” Papyrus gestured to Rin and Matt.

“B-But it looks kinda deep, you know? I think we should take things slowly and—“

“C’mon, Matt! Let’s just go for it!” Rin cut Matt off as she grabbed his hand and leaped down into the tunnel. Hajime heard Matt’s fading yelp as he was dragged down.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be right there!” Papyrus called down as he was the next to jump in. Hajime was just about to follow his tracks when he heard Penny call out behind him.

“Wait! What about the others? We need to tell them about this tunnel too!”

“Goddamnit, you’re right. We can’t just let them become victims to the explosives!” Stewie acknowledged.

“Are you guys going to be okay? I have no idea how much time we have left to escape.” Hajime asked, concerned.

“We swear we’ll be quick! We’ll be right behind you, Hajime!” Penny promised.

“Alright, if you say so. I’ll see you guys soon.” And on that final note, Hajime finally jumped down into the tunnel. He landed heavily onto his feet, which took him a second or two to stabilise himself before he could run again. Catching up to the three, he cited Penny and Stewie’s plan through bated pants.

It was extremely dark inside the tunnel, and Hajime had to strain his vision just to stay on track and not trip into anyone else. The anxiety of a sudden blast of white like on the bridge flooded his mind, but this time he wouldn’t wake up from it. It was crazy to think despite how tired he felt, his legs seemed to carry him along just fine. As long as he ignored the aching starting to simmer up his knees, that was.

Eventually the four arrived at a dead end, and Hajime’s heart rate shot through the roof momentarily. Was this the end? Was this flee all for nothing?

“Hey, look! I think that’s a door!” Matt pointed towards a cellar door hidden by the pitch black nature of the tunnel.

“Alright, on the count of three, Hajime!” Papyrus announced.

“W-What?” Hajime jerked, unsure on what he meant.

“Three!” Papyrus began to dash to the door by the lead of his shoulder and Hajime had no choice but to follow along in the same manner. With both of their weight pummelling against the door simultaneously, it’s hinges hurled open and they flew out into the open air of the outside. Hajime had never been so glad to suck in a breath of fresh air before in his life. At least he knew what a claustrophobic killing game felt like.

Rin and Matt soon rushed out behind them, gawking fearfully at the sight in front of them.

“Monokumas?!” Rin exclaimed as a troop of robot bears marched around the area. There was way too many to even attempt to handle, Hajime decided.

“Just keep running! And don’t look back!” He demanded, and the four sprinted down the street far, far away from that damned church.

Hajime knew when he heard the ringing explosion go off somewhere behind them, but he refused to acknowledge it. Did the others get out in time? He had no time to check. They needed to run, they needed to survive.

And they were going to survive this goddamn city.

Sunny sat in her large chair, swinging her legs over the edge, feet hardly reaching the floor. Her smile was gone, instead replaced with a straight lip. She sighed as she swivelled in her chair to face the other person present in the room.

“Huh? What’s wrong, hm?” The figure leaned down to meet her face straight on.

“Look, just because you’re new around here, doesn’t mean you get to do whatever the hell you want. You may not understand yet, but I have a strict way of doing things, okay?” Sunny gave them a cold look. “Don’t be so stupidly reckless or I’ll send you to the bad student corner.”

The person’s eyes widened. “Wait, that’s a thing around here? Or like, has that just been engraved in you by your teachers? Damn, the education system really *is* fucked.”

“Just—“

“No, no, don’t answer that.” They brushed off, waving their hand. They leaned back up and started to pace. “What *you* may not understand is that the best pain comes from recklessness, you know, you know? And, well, I *am* your best bet anyway if you want to be the next Hatsune Miku.”

“I’m not saying I despised what you did. I think it’s something Miku could do!” Sunny suddenly changed to a cheery attitude. “But I didn’t want you to hijack *my* game. I spent a long time planning it.”

“And I ruined it ‘cuz it was a dumbass idea!” The person scoffed. “I mean, how predictably annoying would starting another killing game be? Nothing could ever come close to Miku’s perfect killing game, anyway. It was, ah, it was incredible, amazing, such a wonderful thing to watch… I’m sorry to say, oh wait I’m not but, whatever we’d do would never be as good as hers…”

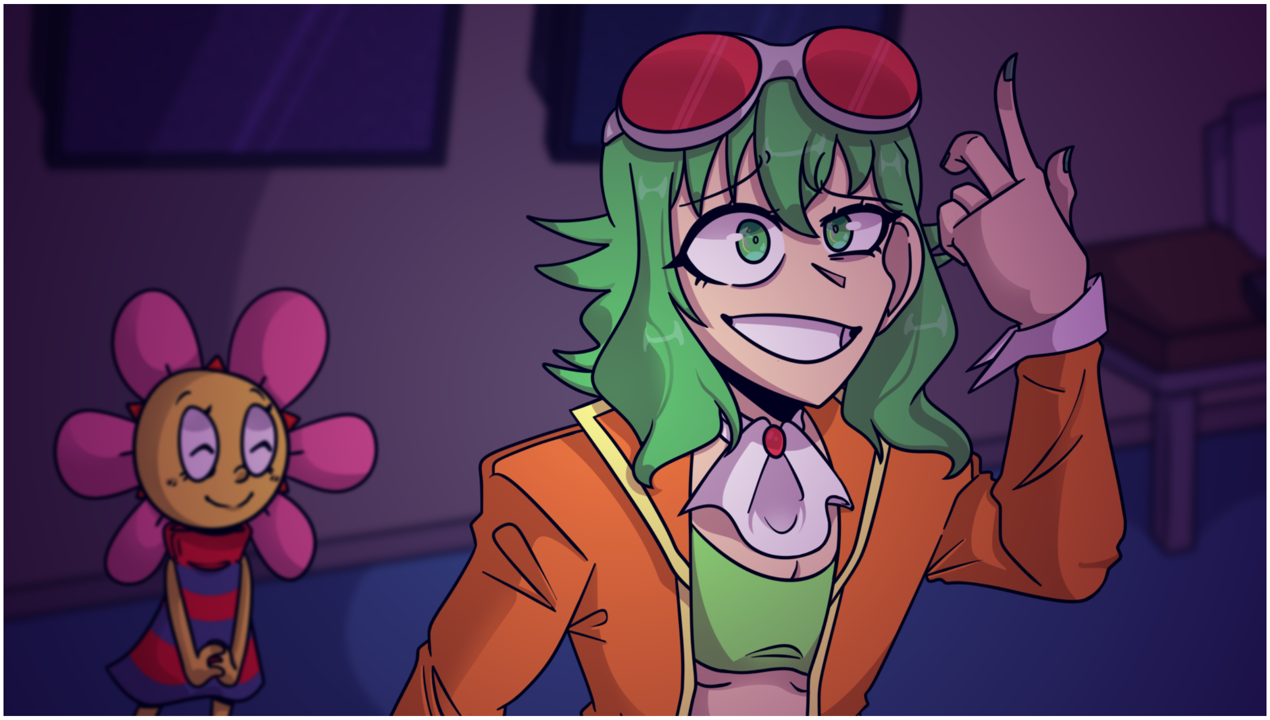
They shivered, cooing slightly under their breath. “Whatever I’d do would never be as perfect as Miku. Perfect, perfect Miku… Ahaha…” And then they paused. “Ah, but no, she’s not, she’s not that perfect is she? She was a goddamn shit-eating whore! Ahaha!”

“Oh, not this again…” Sunny sighed quietly as not to let them hear.

“God but I… I want to be so much closer to her! Was she thinking about me before she blew up with her school? I bet she was— no, of course not. Her mind was filled with so much nauseating despair over losing her precious participants and— no, no, I bet it was over how scared she was to really die that lying freak— ah!”

They shook their head. “Well, it’s okay. We’re going to be better than Miku! Way better! Ahaha!”

Sunny stood up and giggled warmly. “…Are you done, Gumi?”



Gumi hummed, gazing out into something that wasn’t there.

“Oh, we’ve just started.”

Chapter End Notes

POPS A PARTY POPPER WOOOOOO
Uh- I mean- oh god everything's going horribly
Did you expect the killing game to end so soon? I bet not (unless you’re like. actually Gumi…)
AND SPEAKING OF GUMI HELLO THERE?! And hey hey guess what? Today’s Gumi’s birthday (26th June) did I work my ass off to get this chapter done for this day when I realised that? Uhhh no (< is lying)
And look at that! Matt’s joined the party! I wonder what’ll happen with our *ultra despair gang* of four…!!! (See what I did there? Heheh…)
[EDIT 03.AUG] yeah so… this story is gonna go on an indefinite hiatus, apologies if anyone actually liked this lol. If you’re wondering the reason why, it’s bc of a lack of motivation and a strong distaste for this AU. Will this ever be picked up again? Uh I highly doubt it as I’ve slightly moved on (I mean I have been on this AU for 2 years now so it’s no surprise the spark has died out). I did have the story planned out kinda so idk if I should share the remaining plot or not but. This was fun to work on at least? For the time I did anyway. It just became too stressful for me because I beat myself up over not working on it and stuff even though deep down I didn’t really want to that much

sometimes. I’m still gonna be writing fanfics but just not this one lol. I really hope you understand this! Tysm <333

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!